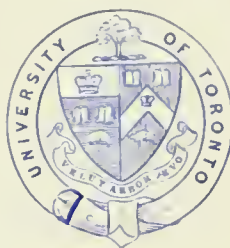




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1864 27. J. Stedart from a Photo by A. Ronald

REV. GEORGE STEDART

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THE

NATIONAL BURNS,

INCLUDING

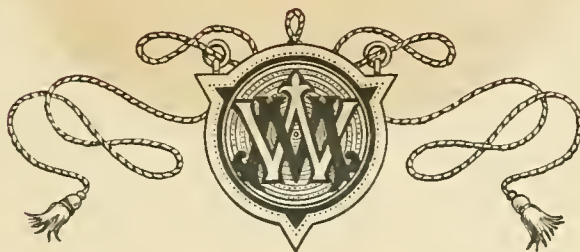
THE AIRS OF ALL THE SONGS

IN THE STAFF AND TONIC SOL-FA NOTATIONS;

EDITED,

WITH AN ORIGINAL LIFE OF BURNS,

BY THE REV. GEORGE GILFILLAN.



509059
3 7 50

LONDON:

WILLIAM MACKENZIE, 69 LUDGATE HILL,

EDINBURGH AND GLASGOW.

W. L. A. M. M. A. \times (N₂)² \rightarrow 2H₂ + N₂ + 2H₂O, (45) + 46





E. P. Brindley

W. M. P. & F. S.



KILLIECRANKIE.



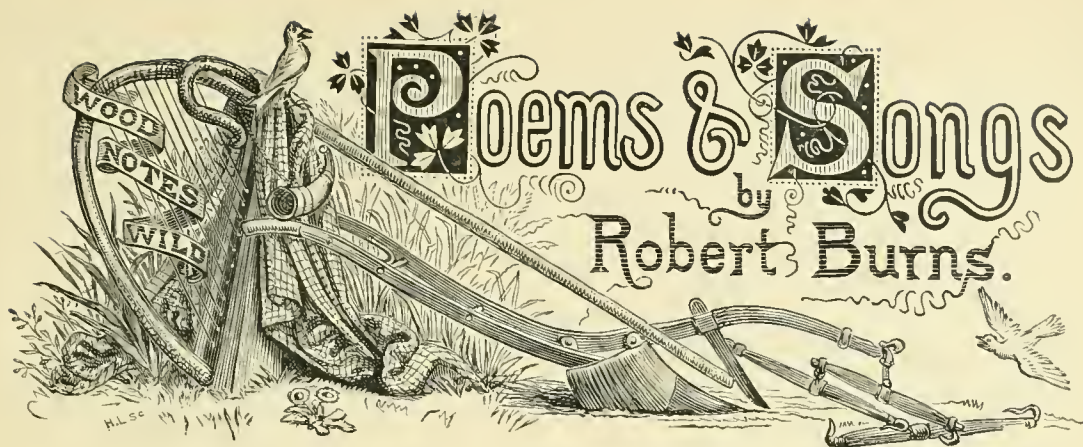
THEN GUIDWIFE COUNT THE LAWIN.



ON PASTORAL POETRY



BONNIE JEAN.



VERSICLES, EPITAPHS, &c.

ON MISS J. SCOTT, OF AYR.

O HAD each Scot of ancient times,
Been Jeany Scott, as thou art;
The bravest heart on English ground,
Had yielded like a coward.



POETICAL REPLY TO AN INVITATION.

SIR, MOSSGIEL, 1786.

YOURS this moment I unseal,
And faith, I 'm gay and hearty!
To tell the truth, an' shame the deil,
I am as fou as Bartie:

But Foorsday, Sir, my promise leal,
Expect me o' your party,
If on a beastie I can speel,
Or hurl in a cartie.—R. B.



THE REPLY.*

LIKE Æsop's lion, Burns says, "Sore I feel
All others' scorn—but damn that ass's heel."



GRACE BEFORE MEAT.

SOME hae meat and canna eat,
And some would eat that want it;
But we hae meat and we can eat,
Sae let the Lord be thankit.

THE BOOK-WORMS.†

THROUGH and through th' inspired leaves,
Ye maggots, make your windings;
But O respect his lordship's taste,
And spare the golden bindings.



A GRACE BEFORE DINNER, EXTEMPORE.

O THOU who kindly dost provide
For every creature's want!
We bless Thee, God of Nature wide,
For all Thy goodness lent:
And, if it please Thee, heavenly Guide,
May never worse be sent;
But, whether granted or denied,
Lord, bless us with content! Amen!



A GRACE AFTER DINNER, EXTEMPORE.

O THOU, in whom we live and move—
Who mad'st the sea and shore;
Thy goodness constantly we prove,
And, grateful, would adore:
And, if it please Thee, Power above!
Still grant us, with such store,
The friend we trust, the fair we love—
And we desire no more. Amen!

* "The Reply:" to one of his assailants in reference to his famous Stirling epigram. See LIFE.

† Written by Burns on a nobleman's copy of Shakspeare, splendidly bound, but unread and worm-eaten.

EXTEMPORANEOUS GRACE ON A HAGGIS.*

YE powers wha gie us a' that 's guid,
Still bless auld Caledonia's brood
Wi' great John Barleycorn's heart's bluid,
In stoups or luggies;
And on our board the king o' food,
A glorious haggis!



REPLY TO A GENTLEMAN,

WHO ASKED IF HE WOULD NOT LIKE TO BE A SOLDIER.

I MURDER hate by flood or field,
Though glory's name may screen us;
In wars at home I'll spend my blood—
Life-giving wars of Venus.
The deities that I adore
Are social Peace and Plenty;
I'm better pleased to make one more,
Than be the death of twenty.

I would not die like Socrates,
For all the fuss of Plato;
Nor would I with Leonidas,
Nor yet would I with Cato:
The zealots of the Church and State
Shall ne'er my mortal foes be;
But let me have bold Zimri's fate,
Within the arms of Cozbi!†



EPIGRAM ADDRESSED TO AN ARTIST.‡

DEAR —, I'll gie ye some advice,
You'll tak it no uncivil:
Ye shouldna paint at angels mair,
But try and paint the devil.
To paint an angel's kittle wark,
Wi' Nick, there's little danger:
You'll easy draw a lang-kent face,
But no sae weel a stranger.—R. B.



EXTEMPORANEOUS EFFUSION

ON BEING APPOINTED TO AN EXCISE DIVISION.

SEARCHING auld wives' barrels,
Ochon, the day!
That clarty barm should stain my laurels;
But—what'll ye say!
These movin' things ca'd wives an' weans.
Wad move the very hearts o' stanes!

THE PARTING KISS.

HUMID seal of soft affections,
Tenderest pledge of future bliss,
Dearest tie of young connections,
Love's first snowdrop, virgin kiss!

Speaking silence, dumb confession,
Passion's birth, and infant's play,
Dove-like fondness, chaste concession,
Glowing dawn of future day!

Sorrowing joy, Adieu's last action
(Lingering lips must now disjoin),
What words can ever speak affection
So thrilling and sincere as thine!



EPITAPH FOR MR. W. CRUICKSHANK.

HONEST Will to Heaven's away,
And mony shall lament him;
His fauts they a' in Latin lay,
In English nane e'er kent them.



ON WILLIAM NICOL.

YE maggots, feed on Nicol's brain,
For few sic feasts you've gotten;
And fix your claws in Nicol's heart,
For deil a bit o't's rotten.



ON A SUICIDE.

EARTH'D up, here lies an imp o' hell,
Planted by Satan's dibble;
Poor silly wretch, he's dammed himsel',
To save the Lord the trouble.



CAULD IS THE E'ENIN' BLAST.

CAULD is the e'enin' blast
O' Boreas o'er the pool,
An' dawin' it is dreary,
When birks are bare at Yule.

Cauld blaws the e'enin' blast,
When bitter bites the frost,
And, in the mirk and dreary drift,
The hills and glens are lost:

Ne'er sae murky blew the night
That drifted o'er the hill,
But bonnie Peg-a-Ramsay
Gat grist to her mill.

* Expanded afterwards into his famous lines on a "Haggis."

† See Numbers xxv. 8-15.

‡ A painter in Edinburgh who was found by Burns painting Jacob's Dream. Burns wrote these lines on the back of a sketch still preserved in the painter's family.

LINES WRITTEN UNDER THE PICTURE OF
THE CELEBRATED MISS BURNS.*

CEASE, ye prudes, your envious railing,
Lovely Burns has charms—confess:
True it is, she had one failing,
Had a woman ever less!

THE KIRK OF LAMINGTON.

As cauld a wind as ever blew
As cauld a priest as ever spak',
A cauld kirk an' in 't but few—
The deil tak' me an I gae back!

WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCH.

A CAULD, cauld day December blew,
A cauld, cauld kirk, and in 't but few;
A caulder minister never spak',
Ye 'se a' be het or I come back.

GRACE AFTER MEAT.

LORD, we thank, and thee adore,
For temporal gifts we little merit;
At present we will ask no more—
Let William Hislop† give the spirit.

THE KEEKIN' GLASS.

A Lord in a state of inebriation, while dining in Mr. Miller's of Dalswinton, asked about one of his daughters, "Wha 's yon howlet-faced thing in the corner?" Burns replied as follows:—

How daur ye ca' me "Howlet-face?"
Ye blear-e'd, wither'd spectre!
Ye only spied the keekin'-glass,
And there ye saw your picture.

ON A SWEARING COXCOMB.

HERE cursing, swearing, Burton lies,
A buck, a beau, or "Dem my eyes!"
Who in his life did little good,
And his last words were, "Dem my blood!"

ON JOHN BUSHBY, ESQ., TINWALD DOWNS.‡

HERE lies John Bushby, honest man;
Cheat him, Devil—if you can!

* The Miss Burns of these lines was more notorious than reputable in Edinburgh at the period when Burns first visited that city.

† "William Hislop:" of the Globe Tavern.

‡ See LIFE.

THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT.§

THE Solemn League and Covenant
Cost Scotland blood—cost Scotland tears;
But it seal'd Freedom's sacred cause—
If thou 'rt a slave, indulge thy sneers.

ON A SCHOOLMASTER IN CLEISH PARISH,
FIFESHIRE.

HERE lie Willie Michie's banes,
O Satan, when ye tak him,
Gie him the schulin' o' your weans,
For clever deils he 'll mak them!

ON BEING ASKED WHY GOD HAD MADE MISS
DAVIES SO LITTLE AND MRS. — SO LARGE.

WRITTEN ON A PANE OF GLASS IN THE INN AT
MOFFAT.

Ask why God made the gem so small?
And why so huge the granite?—
Because God meant mankind should set
That higher value on it.

LINES WRITTEN ON A PANE OF GLASS,
ON THE OCCASION OF A NATIONAL THANKSGIVING FOR
A NAVAL VICTORY.

YE hypocrites! are these your pranks?
To murder men, and give God thanks!
Desist, for shame!—proceed no further,
God wont accept your thanks for murther!

THE BLACK-HEADED EAGLE: A FRAGMENT.
ON THE DEFEAT OF THE AUSTRIANS BY DUMOURIER,
AT GEMAPPE, NOVEMBER, 1792.

THE black-headed eagle,
As keen as a beagle,
He hunted o'er height and o'er howe;
But fell in a trap,
On the braes o' Gemappe;
E'en let him come out as he dow.

ON GRIZEL GRIM.

HERE lies with Death auld Grizel Grim,
Lincluden's ugly witch;
O Death! how horrid is thy taste
To lie with such a b—h.

§ Spoken in reply to a gentleman who sneered at the Covenant.

ON HEARING THAT THERE WAS FALSEHOOD
IN THE REV. DR. BABINGTON'S VERY LOOKS.

THAT there is falsehood in his looks,
I must and will deny:
They tell their Master is a knave,
And sure they do not lie.



YOU 'RE WELCOME, WILLIE STEWART.*

You 're welcome, Willie Stewart,
You 're welcome, Willie Stewart,
There 's ne'er a flower that blooms in May,
That 's half sae welcome 's thou art!

Come, bumpers high, express your joy,
The bowl we mair renew it;
The tappet hen, gae bring her ben,
To welcome Willie Stewart.

May foes be strang, and friends be slack,
Ilk action, may he rue it;
May woman on him turn her back
That wrangs thee, Willie Stewart!



ON ANDREW TURNER.

Addressed to a coxcomb named Andrew Turner, who patronized him, and asked a specimen of his verse from the moment, which he gave him thus:—

IN se'enteen hunder and forty-nine,
The deil gat stuff to mak a swine,
An' coost it in a corner;
But wilily he chang'd his plan,
An' shap'd it something like a man,
An' ca'd it Andrew Turner.



TO JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.,†

WITH SOME BOOKS.

O COULD I give thee India's wealth,
As I this trifle send;
Because thy joy in both would be
To share them with a friend.

But golden sands did never grace
The Heliconian stream;
Then take what gold could never buy—
An honest Bard's esteem.

* Written on a tumbler by Burns, on the arrival of a friend, Mr. W. Stewart, a factor in Nithsdale, which became Sir Walter Scott's property.

† "John M'Murdo, Esq.:" this gentleman was steward to the Duke of Queensberry; alluded to in Second Epistle to Graham of Fintry.

LINES ON JOHN M'MURDO, ESQ.

BLEST be M'Murdo to his latest day!
No envious cloud o'ercast his evening ray;
No wrinkle, furrow'd by the hand of care,
Nor ever sorrow add one silver hair!
O may no son the father's honour stain,
Nor ever daughter give the mother pain!



LINES

WRITTEN ON A WINDOW OF THE GLOVE TAVERN,
DUMFRIES.

THE graybeard, old Wisdom, may boast of his treasures,
Give me with gay Folly to live;
I grant him his calm-blooded, time-settled pleasures,
But Folly has raptures to give.



LINES

WRITTEN ON A WINDOW, AT THE KING'S ARMS TAVERN,
DUMFRIES.

YE men of wit and wealth, why all this sneering
'Gainst poor excisemen? give the cause a hearing;
What are your landlords' rent-rolls?—taxing ledgers;
What premiers? what even monarchs?—mighty gaugers;
Nay, what are priests, those seeming godly wise-men,
What are they, pray, but spiritual excisemen?



ON ROBERT RIDDELL, ESQ.‡

To Riddell, much lamented man,
This ivied cot was dear;
Wand'rer, dost value matchless worth?
This ivied cot revere.



ON A NOTED COXCOMB,

CAPTAIN WILLIAM RODDICK, OF CORBISTON.

LIGHT lay the earth on Billy's breast,
His chicken heart so tender;
But build a castle on his head,
His seull will prop it under.



ON COMMISSARY GOLDIE'S BRAINS.

LORD, to account who dares thee call,
Or e'er dispute thy pleasure?
Else why, within so thick a wall,
Enclose so poor a treasure?

‡ "Robert Riddell, Esq.:" of Friars Carse.

ON GABRIEL RICHARDSON, BREWER,
DUMFRIES.

HERE Brewer Gabriel's fire 's extinet,
And empty all his barrels :
He 's blest—if, as he brew'd, he drink,
In upright, honest morals.



TO MISS JESSY LEWARS,*

WITH BOOKS WHICH THE BARD PRESENTED HER.

THINE be the volumes, Jessy fair,
And with them take the Poet's prayer,
That Fate may, in her fairest page,
With ev'ry kindest, best presage
Of future bliss, enrol thy name :
With native worth and spotless fame,
And wakeful caution, still aware
Of ill—but chief, Man's felon snare ;
All blameless joys on earth we find,
And all the treasures of the mind—
These be thy guardian and reward ;
So prays thy faithful friend, the Bard.



THE EARL OF GALLOWAY.†

WHAT dost thou in that mansion fair ?
Flit, Galloway, and find
Some narrow, dirty, dungeon cave,
The picture of thy mind.



ON SIR DAVID MAXWELL OF CARDONESS.

BLESS the Redeemer, Cardoness,
With grateful, lifted eyes,
Who said that not the soul alone,
But body too, shall rise ;
For had he said, "The soul alone
From death I will deliver :"
Alas, alas, O Cardoness !
Then hadst thou slept for ever !



ON WILLIAM GRAHAM, ESQ., OF MOSSKNOWE.

"STOP thief !" dame Nature call'd to Death,
As Willy drew his latest breath ;
How shall I make a fool again ?
My choicest model thou hast ta'en.

* See LIFE.

† See LIFE.

ON BURNS' HORSE BEING IMPOUNDED.

WAS e'er poor poet sae befitted,
The maister drunk—the horse committed :
Puir harmless beast ! tak' thee nae care,
Thou 'lt be a horse when he 's nae mair (*mayor*).



MY bottle is my holy pool,
That heals the wounds o' care an' dool ;
And pleasure is a wanton trout,
An' ye drink it dry, ye 'll find him out.



THE HENPECKED HUSBAND.

CURS'D be the man, the poorest wretch in life,
The crouching vassal to a tyrant wife !
Who has no will but by her high permission,
Who has no sixpence but in her possession ;
Who must to her his dear friend's secrets tell,
Who dreads a curtain lecture worse than hell.
Were such the wife had fallen to my part,
I 'd break her spirit or I 'd break her heart ;
I 'd charm her with the magic of a switch,
I 'd kiss her maids, and kick the perverse b—h.



ON THE EARL OF GALLOWAY.

No Stewart art thou, Galloway,
The Stewarts all were brave ;
Besides, the Stewarts were but fools,
Not one of them a knave.



ON THE SAME.

BRIGHT ran thy line, O Galloway,
Through many a far-famed sire !
So ran the far-famed Roman way,
And ended in a mire.



ON THE SAME.

SPARE me thy vengeance, Galloway !
In quiet let me live ;
I ask no kindness at thy hand,
For thou hast none to give.



ON AN INNKEEPER NICKNAMED "THE
MARQUIS."

HERE lies a moek Marquis, whose titles were sham'd,
If ever he rise, it will be to be damn'd.

THE TOADEATER.

OF Lordly acquaintance you boast,
 And the Dukes that you dined with yestreen;
 Why, an insect 's an insect at most,
 Though it crawl on the curl of a Queen!

PINNED TO MRS. WALTER RIDDELL'S
CARRIAGE.

If you rattle along like your Mistress's tongue,
 Your speed will outrival the dart;
 But a fly for your load, you 'll break down on the road,
 If your stuff be as rotten 's her heart.



TO THE BEAUTIFUL MISS ELIZA J—N,

ON HER PRINCIPLES OF LIBERTY AND EQUALITY.

How, Liberty! girl, can it be by thee nam'd?
 Equality too! hussey, art not asham'd?
 Free and Equal indeed, while mankind thou enchainest,
 And over their hearts a proud Despot so reignest!

EXTEMPORE REPLY TO AN INVITATION.

THE King's most humble servant, I
 Can scarcely spare a minute;
 But I 'll be wi' you by an' by;
 Or else the Deil 's be in it.



ON CAPTAIN LASCELLES.

WHEN Lascelles thought fit from this world to depart,
 Some friends warmly thought of embalming his heart;
 A bystander whispers—"Pray don't make so much o't,
 The subject is poison, no reptile will touch it."



ON CHLORIS

REQUESTING ME TO GIVE HER A SPRIG OF BLOSSOMED
 THORN.

FROM the white-blossom'd sloe my dear Chloris requested
 A sprig, her fair breast to adorn:
 No, by Heavens! I exclaim'd, let me perish if ever
 I plant in that bosom a thorn! *

* The above lines, with an additional stanza by Charles Dibdin,
 were set to a popular and beautiful tune by W. Shield the composer.

PIECES OF UNKNOWN DATE.

CALEDONIA—A BALLAD.

THERE was once a time, but old Time was then young,
That brave Caledonia, the chief of our line,
From some of your northern deities sprung
(Who knows not that brave Caledonia's divine ?)
From Tweed to the Orcades was her domain,
To hunt, or to pasture, or do what she would :
Her heav'nly relations there fix'd her reign,
And pledg'd her their godheads to warrant it good.

A lambkin in peace, but a lion in war,
The pride of her kindred, the heroine grew :
Her grandsire, old Odin, triumphantly swore—
"Who'e'r shall provoke thee, th' encounter shall rue !" [†]
With tillage or pasture at times she would sport,
To feed her fair flocks by her green rustling corn ;
But chiefly the woods were her fav'rite resort,
Her darling amusement, the hounds and the horn.

Long quiet she reigned ; till thitherward steers
A flight of bold eagles * from Adria's strand :
Repeated, successive, for many long years,
They darken'd the air, and they plunder'd the land :
Their pounces were murder, and terror their cry,
They 'd conquer'd and ruin'd a world beside ;
She took to her hills, and her arrows let fly,
The daring invaders, they fled or they died.

The Cameleon-Savage disturb'd her repose,
With tumult, disquiet, rebellion, and strife ;
Provok'd beyond bearing, at last she arose,
And robb'd him at once of his hopes and his life : †
The Anglian lion, the terror of France,
Oft prowling, ensanguin'd the Tweed's silver flood ;
But, taught by the bright Caledonian lance,
He learn'd to fear in his own native wood.

The fell Harpy-raven took wing from the north,
The scourge of the seas, and the dread of the shore ; ‡
The wild Scandinavian bear § issued forth
To wanton in carnage and wallow in gore :
O'er countries and kingdoms their fury prevail'd,
No arts could appease them, no arms could repel ;
But brave Caledonia in vain they assail'd,
As Largs well can witness, and Loncartie tell. ||

* "Bold eagles:" the Romans.

† The Picts.

‡ "Dread of the shore:" the Saxons.

§ "Scandinavian bear:" the Danes.

|| "Largs and Loncartie:" two famous battles in which the Danes or Norwegians were defeated.

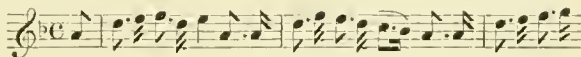
Thus bold, independent, unconquer'd, and free,
Her bright course of glory for ever shall run :
For brave Caledonia immortal must be ;
I 'll prove it from Euclid as clear as the sun :
Rectangle-triangle, the figure we 'll chuse :
The upright is Chance, and old Time is the base ;
But brave Caledonia's the hypotenuse ;
Then, ergo, she 'll match them, and match them always.



OH, WHA IS SHE THAT LO'ES ME?

Slow.

TUNE—"Morag."



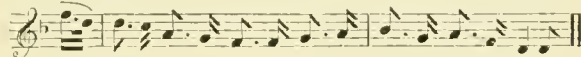
Oh, wha is she that lo'es me, And has my heart a-keeping? Oh, sweet is she that



lo'es me, As dew's o' sim-mer weeping, In tears the rosebuds steep-ing!



CHORUS—O that's the lassie o' my heart, My lassie ev-er dear-er;



Oh, that's the queen o' wo-man kind, And ne'er a ane to peer her.

If thou shalt meet a lassie
In grace and beauty charming,
That e'en thy chosen lassie,
Erewhile thy breast sae warming,
Had ne'er sic powers alarming:
Oh, that 's the lassie, &c.

If thou had heard her talking,
And thy attention 's plighted,
That ilka body talking,
But her by thee is slighted;
And thou art all delighted:
Oh, that 's the lassie, &c.

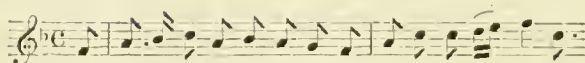
If thou hast met this fair one,
When frae her thou has parted,
If every other fair one,
But her, thou hast deserted,
And thou art broken hearted.
Oh, that 's the lassie, &c.

OLD SONGS IMPROVED.

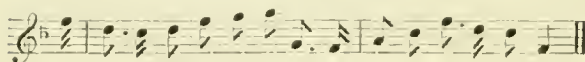
THE PLOUGHMAN.

LIVELY.

TUNE—"The Ploughman."



The ploughman he's a bon-nie lad, His mind is ev-er true, Jo;
 Chorcs—Then up wi' my ploughman lad, And hey my mer-ry ploughman!



His gar-ters knit be-low his knee, His bon-net it is blue, Jo.
 Of a the trades that I do ken, Com-mend me to the ploughman.

My ploughman he comes hame at e'en,
 He 's aften wat and weary;
 Cast aff the wat, put on the dry,
 And gae to bed, my dearie!
 Then up wi' my ploughman, &c.

I will wash my ploughman's hose,
 And I will dress his o'erlay;
 I will make my ploughman's bed,
 And cheer him late and early.
 Then up wi' my ploughman, &c.

I hae been east, I hae been west,
 I hae been at St. Johnston;
 The bonniest sight that e'er I saw
 Was the ploughman laddie dancin'.
 Then up wi' my ploughman, &c.

Snaw-white stockings on his legs,
 And siller buckles glancin';
 A guid blue bonnet on his head—
 And oh, but he was handsome!
 Then up wi' my ploughman, &c.

Commend me to the barn-yard,
 And the corn-mou', man;
 I never gat my coggie fou,
 Till I met wi' the ploughman.
 Then up wi' my ploughman, &c.

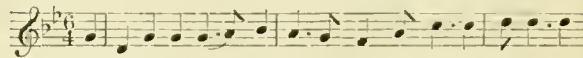
Up wi' my ploughman lad,
 And hey my merry ploughman!
 Of a' the trades that I do ken,
 Commend me to the ploughman.
 Then up wi' my ploughman, &c.



OH, WHARE DID YE GET?

SLOW.

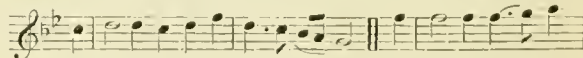
TUNE—"Adieu Dundee."



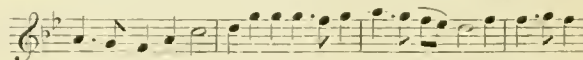
Oh, whare did ye get that hauer meal bannock? Oh, siller blind



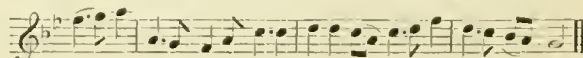
body, oh dinna ye see? I gat it frae a brisk young sod-ger lad-die,



Between Saint Johnston and bonnie Dundee. Oh, gin I saw the



lad-die that gae me't! Aft has be doudled me upon his knee; May Heaven pro-



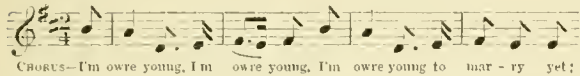
tect my bonnie Scots laddie, And send him safe hame to his baby and me!

My blessin's upon thy sweet wee lippie,
 My blessin's upon thy bonnie e'ebree!
 Thy smiles are sae like my blythe sodger laddie,
 Thou 's aye the dearer and dearer to me!
 But I 'll big a bower on yon bonnie banks,
 Where Tay rins wimplin' by sae clear;
 And I 'll cleed thee in the tartan sae fine,
 And mak' thee a man like thy daddie dear.

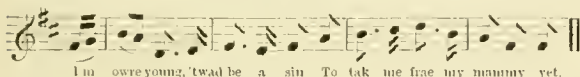


I'M OWRE YOUNG TO MARRY YET.

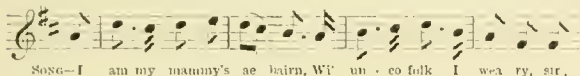
SLOWLY. "I'm owre young to marry yet."



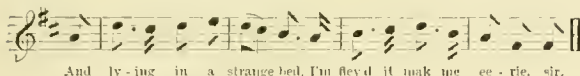
CHORUS—I'm owre young, I'm owre young, I'm owre young to mar - ry yet;



I'm owre young, 'twad be a sin To tak me frae my mammy yet.



SONG—I am my mammy's ae hairn, Wi' un - co folk I wea ry, sir,



And ly - ing in a strange bed, I'm fley'd it mak me ee - rie, sir,

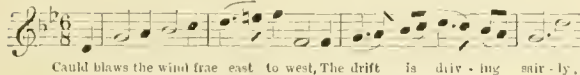
Hallowmass is come and gaue,
 The nights are lang in winter, sir,
 And you an' I in ae bed,
 In trowth, I dare na venture, sir.
 I'm owre young, &c.

Fu' loud an' shrill the frosty wind
 Blaws through the leafless tinner, sir;
 But if ye come this gate again,
 I'll aulder be gin simmer, sir.
 I'm owre young, &c.

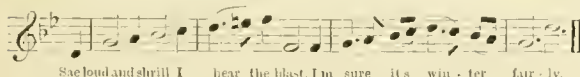


UP IN THE MORNING EARLY.

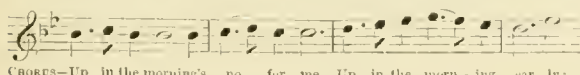
LIVELY. TUNE—"Up in the Morning Early."



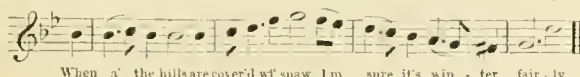
Cauld blaws the wind frae east to west, The drift is driv - ing snar - ly,



Sae loud and shrill I hear the blast, I'm sure it's win - ter fair - ly.



CHORUS—Up in the morning's no for me, Up in the morn - ing ear - ly;



When a' the hills are cover'd wi' snaw, I'm sure it's win - ter fair - ly.

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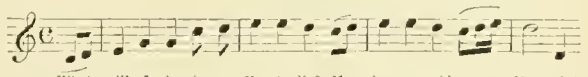
The birds sit chattering in the thorn,
 A' day they fare but sparely;
 And lang 's the night frae e'en to morn—
 I'm sure its winter fairly.
 Up in the morning 's, &c.



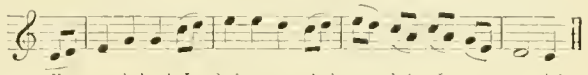
MY HOGGIE.

LIVELY.

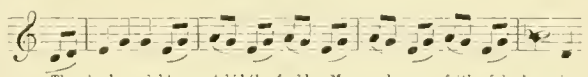
TUNE—"What will I do gin my Hoggie Die"



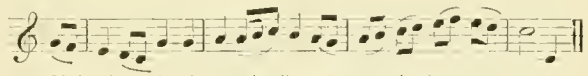
What will I do gin my Hoggie die? My Joy, my pride, my Hog - gie!



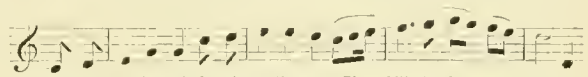
My on - ly beast, I had nae mae, And vow but I was vog - le!



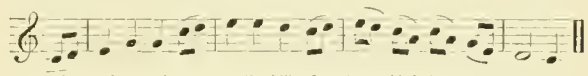
The lee-lang night we watch'd the fauld, Me and my faith - fu' dog - gie;



We heard naught but the roar - ing lion, A - mong the braes sae scrog - gie.



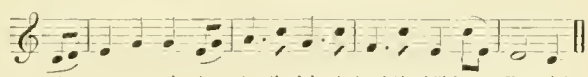
But the houlet cry'd frae the castle wa', The blit - ter frae the bog - gie;



The tod reply'd up - on the hill, I trem - bled for my Hog - gie.



When day did daw, and cocks did crow, The morn - ing it was fog - gie;



An un - co tyke lap o'er the dyke, And maist has kill'd my Hog - gie!



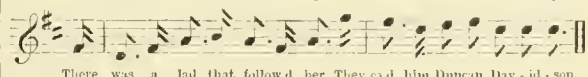
DUNCAN DAVIDSON.

LIVELY.

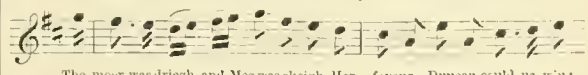
TUNE—"Duncan Davidson."



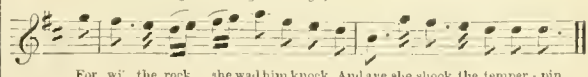
There was a lass, they ca'd her Meg, And she held o'er the moors to spin;



There was a lad that follow'd her, They ca'd him Duncan Dav - id - son.



The moor was driegh, and Meg was skeigh, Her favour Duncan could na win;



For wi' the rock she wad him knock, And aye she shook the temper - pin.

As o'er the moor they lightly foot,
 A burn was clear, a glen was green,
 Upon the banks they eas'd their shanks,
 And aye she set the wheel between;
 But Duncan swor a haly aith,
 That Meg should be a bride the morn;
 Then Meg took up her spinnin'-graith,
 And flang them a' out o'er the burn.

We will big a wee, wee house,
 And we will live like king and queen;
 Sae blythe and merry 's we will be,
 When ye set by the wheel at e'en.
 A man may drink, and no be drunk;
 A man may fight, and no be slain;
 A man may kiss a bonnie lass,
 And aye be welcome back again!



LADY ONLIE.

LIVELY.

TUNE—"The Ruffian's Rant."

A' the lads o' Thorne-bank, When they gae to the shore o' Bucky,
 They'll slap in and tak' a' pint wi' Lady Onlie, honest Lucky!
 CHORUS—Lady Onlie, honest Lucky, Brewsguidale at shore o' Bucky, I
 wish her sale for her guidale, The best on a the shore o' Bucky.

Her house sae bien, her curch sae clean,
 I wat she is a dainty chucky!
 And cheerlie blinks the ingle-bleed
 Of Lady Onlie, honest Lucky!
 Lady Onlie, honest Lucky, &c.



JAMIE, COME TRY ME.

SLOW.

TUNE—"I'll never leave thee."

Ja-mie, come try me, Ja-mie, come try me, If thou would win my
 love, Ja-mie, come try me. If thou should ask my love, Could I de-
 ny thee! If thou would win my love, Ja-mie, come try me.

If thou should kiss me, love,
 Wha could espy thee?
 If thou wad be my love,
 Jamie, come try me!
 Jamie, come try me, &c.



WHISTLE OWRE THE LAVE O'T.

SLOW

TUNE—"Whistle owre the lave o't"

First when Meg-gie was my care, Heav'n, I thought, was lu' her air;
 Now we're married—spler nae mair—Whis-tle owre the lave o't
 Meg was meek, and Meg was mild, Bonnie Meg was nature's child;
 Wi' set men than me's beguiled—Whistle owre the lave o't.

How we live, my Meg and me,
 How we love, and how we gree,
 I care na by how few may see—
 Whistle owre the lave o't!
 Wha I wish were maggot's meat,
 Dish'd up in her winding-sheet,
 I could write—but Meg may see 't—
 Whistle owre the lave o't!



AWA' WHIGS, AWA'.

CHORUS—A - wa' Whigs, a - wa'! A - wa' Whigs, a - wa'! Ye're
 but a pack o' trait-or louns, Ye'll do nae guid at a'.
 Our thrissals flour-ish'd fresh and fair, And bon-nie bloom'd our roses;
 But Whigs can' like a frost in June, And wi'-ther'd a' our po-sies.

Our ancient crown 's fa'en in the dust—
 Deil blin' them wi' the stoure o't!

An' write their names in his black beuk,
Wha gae the Whigs the power o't.
Awa' Whigs, &c.

Our sad decay in church and state
Surpasses my describing:
The Whigs can't o'er us for a curse,
An' we hae done wi' thriving.
Awa' Whigs, &c.

Grim vengeance lang has taen a nap,
But we may see him waukin':
Guid help the day when Royal heads
Are hunted like a maukin!
Awa' Whigs, &c.



CA' THE YOWES TO THE KNOWES.*

CHORUS.—Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
Ca' them where the heather grows,
Ca' them where the burnie rowes,
My bonnie dearie.

As I gae'd down the water-side,
There I met my shepherd lad:
He row'd me sweetly in his plaid,
An' ca'd me his dearie.
Ca' the yowes, &c.

Will ye gang down the water-side,
And see the waves sae sweetly glide
Beneath the hazels spreading wide?
The moon it shines fu' clearly.
Ca' the yowes, &c.

Ye sall get gowns and ribbons meet,
Caulf-leather shoon upon your feet,
And in my arms thou'lt lie and sleep,
An' aye sall be my dearie.
Ca' the yowes, &c.

If ye'll but stand to what ye've said,
I se gang wi' thee, my shepherd lad,
And ye may row me in your plaid,
And I sall be your dearie.
Ca' the yowes, &c.

While waters wimple to the sea,
While day blinks in the lift sae hie,
Till clay-cauld death sall blin' my e'e,
Ye sall be my dearie.
Ca' the yowes, &c.

* Burns improved the above song for "Johnson's Museum," but afterwards entirely remodelled it for "Thomson's," only retaining the chorus. For air, see CORRESPONDENCE.

WHARE HAE YE BEEN SAE BRAW, LAD?

TUNE—"Killiecrankie."

Whare hae ye been sae braw, lad? Whare hae ye been sae brankie, O?

Whare hae ye been sae braw, lad? Can ye by Kil-lie-cran-kie, O?

CHORUS—An ye had been whare I hae been, Ye wadna been sae cantie, O;

An ye had seen what I hae seen, On the braes o' Kil-lie-crankie, O.

I faught at land, I faught at sea,
At hame I faught my Auntie, O;
But I met the devil an' Dundee,
On the Braes o' Killiecrankie, O.
An ye had been, &c.

The bauld Piteur fell in a furr,
An' Clavers gat a clankie, O;
Or I had fed an Athole gled,
On the Braes o' Killiecrankie, O.
An ye had been, &c.



YOUNG JOCKIE WAS THE BLYTHEST LAD.

TUNE—"Young Jockie was the Blythest Lad."

Young Jock - ie was the blyth - est lad, In a' our
Fu blythe he whis - tled at the gaud, Fu' light - ly

town or here a - wa'; } He roos'd my een sae bon - nie
danc'd he in the ha'; }

blue, He roos'd my waist sae gen - ty snaw', An' aye my heart

can to my mou, When ne'er a bo - dy heard or saw.

My Jockie toils upon the plain,
Through wind and weet, through frost and snaw;
And o'er the lea I leuk fu' fain,
When Jockie's owsen hameward ca'.

An' aye the night comes round again,
When in his arms he taks me a';
An' aye he vows he'll be my ain,
As lang as he has breath to draw.



AS I WAS A-WANDERING.

PLAINTIVE.

TUNE—"Gaelic Air."

As I was a-wand'ring ae mid sun-met ee nu, The pop-ers
and young-sters were mak-ing their game; A-mang them I sped my
faith-less fause lov-er, Which bled a the wound o' my do-lour a-gan.
Weel, since he last left me, may pleasure gae wi' him; I may be distress'd, but
I win-na com-plain; I flat-ter my fan-cy I may get an-ith-
er, My heart it shall nev-er be brok-en for aye.

I couldna get sleepin' till dawin' for greetin';
The tears trickled down like the hail and the rain;
Had I na got greetin', my heart wad a broken,
For, oh! love forsaken 's a tormenting pain.
Although he has left me for greed o' the siller,
I didna envy him the gains he can win:
I rather wad bear a' the lade o' my sorrow,
Than ever hae acted sae faithless to him.



THE WEARY PUND O' TOW.

VERY SLOW.

TUNE—"The Weary Pund o' Tow."

CHORUS—The wea-ry pund, the wea-ry pund, The wea-ry pund o' tow;
I think my wife will end her life, Be-fore she spin her tow.
I bought my wife a stane o' lint, As gude as eer did grow,
And a' that she has made o' that Is ae pair pund o' tow.

There sat a bottle in a bole,
Ayont the ingle low;
And aye she took the tither souk,
To drouk the stourie tow.
The weary pund, &c.

Quoth I, for shame, ye dirty dame,
Gae spin your tap o' tow!
She took the rock, and wi' a knock,
She brake it o'er my bow.
The weary pund, &c.

At last her feet—I sang to see't!
Gad foremost o'er the knowe,
And or I wad anither jad,
I'll wallop in a tow.
The weary pund, &c.



THE TITHER MORN.

LIVELY.

TUNE—"The Tither Morn."

The tither morn, When I, forlorn, A-neath an aik sat moaning,
I did na trow, I'd see my jo Beside me gin the gleaming.
But he sae trig, Lap o'er the rig, And daw-tingly did cheer me,
When I, what reck, Did least expect To see my lad so near me.

His bonnet he, a thought ajeer,
Cock'd sprush when first he clasp'd me;
And I, I wat, wi' faunness grat,
While in his grips he press'd me.
Deil tak the war! I late and air
Hae wish'd since Jock departed;
But now as glad I'm wi' my lad,
As short syne broken-hearted.

Fu' aft at e'en wi' dancing keen,
When a' were blythe and merry,
I cared na by, sae sad was I,
In absence o' my dearie.
But, praise be blest, my mind 's at rest,
I'm happy wi' my Johnnie;
At kirk and fair I 'se aye be there,
And be as canty 's ony.



IT IS NA, JEAN, THY BONNIE FACE.

TUNE—"The Man's Complaint."

It is na, Jean, thy bon-nie face, Nor shape that I ad-mire;
 Al-though thy beau-ty and thy grace Might weel a-wauk de-sire.
 Something, in il-ka part o' thee, To praise, to love, I find;
 But dear as is thy form to me, Still dear-er is thy mind.

Nae mair ungenerous wish I hae,
 Nor stronger in my breast,
 Than, if I canna mak' thee sae,
 At least to see thee blest.
 Content am I, if Heaven shall give
 But happiness to thee;
 And as wi' thee I'd wish to live,
 For thee I'd bear to die.

GUIDWIFE, COUNT THE LAWIN.

LIVELY.

TUNE—"Guidwife, Count the Lawin."

Gane is the day, and mink's the night, But we'll ne'er stray for faute o' light;
 Guid ale and brandy's stars and moon, And blude-red wine's the ris-ing sun.
 CHORUS—Then guid-wife, count the law-in, The law-in, the law-in,
 Then guid-wife, count the law-in, And bring a cog-gie mair.

There's wealth and ease for gentlemen,
 And simple folk maun fecht and fen';
 But here we're a' in ae accord,
 For ilka man that's drunk's a lord.
 Then guidwife, &c.

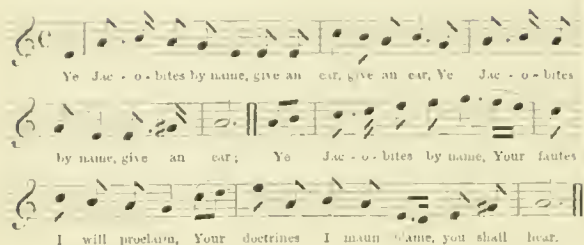
My coggie is a haly pool
 That heals the wounds o' care and dool;

And Pleasure is a wanton trout,
An ye drink it a', ye'll find him out.
Then guidwife, &c.



YE JACOBITES BY NAME.

Slowish



What is Right, and what is Wrang, by the law, by the law?
What is Right, and what is Wrang, by the law?
What is Right, and what is Wrang?
A short sword, and a lang,
A weak arm and a strang, for to draw.

What makes heroic strife, famed afar, famed afar?
What makes heroic strife famed afar?
What makes heroic strife?
To whet th' assassin's knife,
Or hunt a Parent's life, wi' bluidie war?

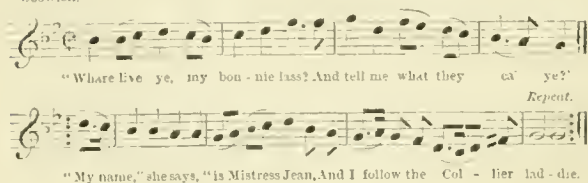
Then let your schemes alone, in the state, in the state;
Then let your schemes alone, in the state;
Then let your schemes alone,
Adore the rising sun,
And leave a man undone, to his fate.



MY COLLIER LADDIE.

Slowish.

TUNE—"The Collier Laddie."



See you not yon hills and dales
The sun shines on sae brawlie;
They a' are mine, and they shall be thine,
Gin ye'll leave your Collier laddie.
They a' are mine, &c.

Ye shall gang in gay attire,
Weel buskit up sae gaudy;
And aye to wait on every hand,
Gin ye'll leave your Collier laddie.
And aye to wait, &c.

Though ye had a' the sun shines on,
And the earth conceals sae lowly,
I wad turn my back on you and it a',
And embrace my Collier laddie.
I wad turn my back, &c.

I can win my five pennies in a day,
An' spend it at night fir' brawlie;
And make my bed in the collier's neuk,
And lie down wi' my Collier laddie.
And make my bed, &c.

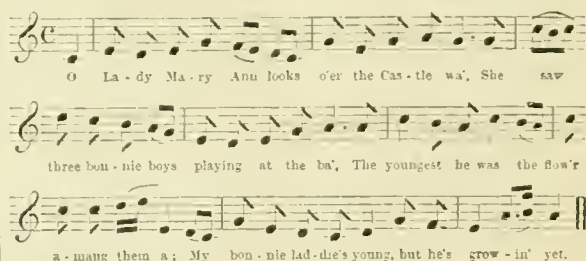
Love for love is the bargain for me,
Though the wee cot-house should haud me;
And the world before me to win my bread,
And fair fa' my Collier laddie!
And the world before me, &c.



LADY MARY ANN.

Slowish

TUNE—"Craigstone's Growin'."



O father, O father, an ye think it fit,
We'll send him a year to the college yet;
We'll sew a green ribbon round about his hat,
And that will let them ken he's to marry yet.

Lady Mary Ann was a flower in the dew,
Sweet was its smell and bonnie was its hue,
And the longer it blossom'd the sweeter it grew;
For the lily in the bud will be bonnier yet.

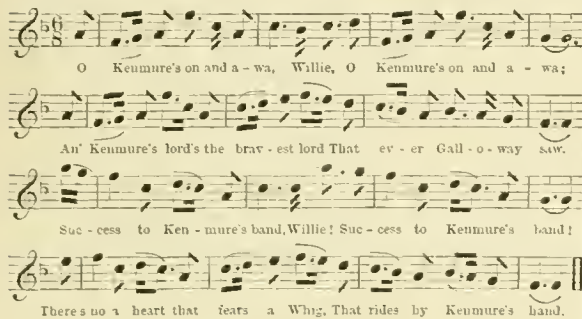
Young Charlie Cochran was the sprout of an aik,
Bonnie and bloomin' and straight was its make;
The sun took delight to shine for its sake,
And it will be the brag o' the forest yet.

The simmer is gane when the leaves they were green,
And the days are awa' that we hae seen,
But far better days I trust will come again ;
For my bonnie laddie 's young, but he 's growin' yet.



O KENMURE 'S ON AND AWA, WILLIE.

WITH SPIRIT.



Here 's Kenmure's health in wine, Willie !
Here 's Kenmure's health in wine !
There 's ne'er a coward o' Kenmure's blude,
Nor yet o' Gordon's line.
O Kenmure's lads are men, Willie,
O Kenmure's lads are men ;
Their hearts and swords are metal true,
And that their foes shall ken.

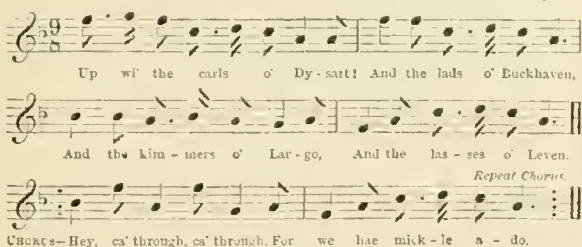
They 'll live or die wi' fame, Willie,
They 'll live or die wi' fame ;
But sune, wi' sounding victorie,
May Kenmure's lord come hame !
Here 's him that 's far awa, Willie !
Here 's him that 's far awa !
And here 's the flower that I loe best,
The rose that 's like the snaw.



BOAT SONG—HEY, CA' THROUGH.

WITH SPIRIT.

TUNE—"Hey, ca' through."



We hae tales to tell,
An' we hae sangs to sing ;
We hae pennies to spend,
An' we hae pints to bring.
Hey, ca' through, &c.

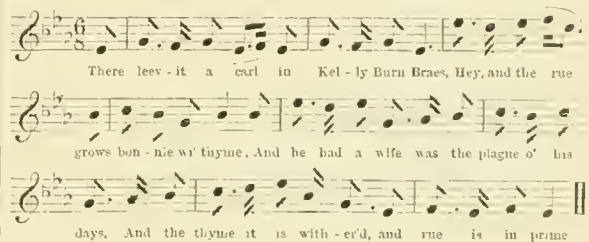
We 'll live a' our days,
And them that comes behin',
Let them do the like,
An' spend the gear they win.
Hey, ca' through, &c.



KELLY BURN BRAES.

LIVELY.

TUNE—"Kelly Burn Braes."



Ae day as the carl gaed up the lang glen,
Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme ;
He met wi' the Deil, wha said, "How do you fen ?"
And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

"I've got a bad wife, sir, that 's a' my complaint,
Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme ;
For, saving your presence, to her ye 're a saint,
And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime."

"It 's neither your stot nor your staig I shall crave,
Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme ;
But gie me your wife, man, for her I must have,
And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime."

"O welcome most kindly !" the blythe carl said,
Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme ;
But if ye can match her ye 're waur than ye 're ca'd,
And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime."

The Devil has got the auld wife on his back,
Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme ;
And like a poor pedlar he 's carried his pack,
And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

He 's carried her hame to his ain hallan door,
Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme ;
Syne bade her gae in for a b—, and a w—,
And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

Then straight he makes fift, the pick o' his band,
 Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme;
 Turn out on her guard in the clasp o' a hand,
 And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

The earlin' gaed through them like ony wud bear,
 Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme;
 Whae'er she gat hands on can't ue'er her nae mair,
 And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

A reekit we deevil looks over the wa',
 Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme;
 "O help, maister, help, or she'll ruin us a'!"
 And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

The Devil he swore by the edge o' his knife,
 Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme;
 He pitied the man that was tied to a wife,
 And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

The Devil he swore by the kirk and the bell,
 Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme;
 He was not in wellock, thank Heav'n, but in hell,
 And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

Then Satan has travell'd again wi' his pack,
 Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme;
 And to her auld husband he's carried her back,
 And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.

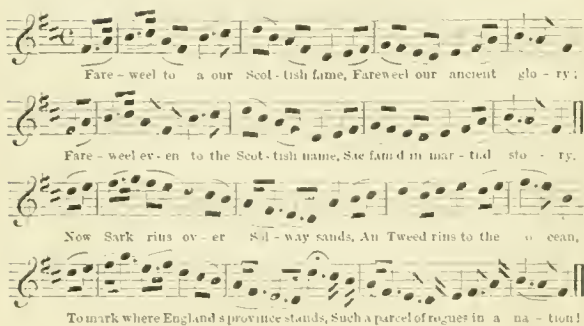
"I hae been a Deevil the feck o' my life,"
 Hey, and the rue grows bonnie wi' thyme;
 "But ne'er was in hell till I met wi' a wife,"
 And the thyme it is wither'd, and rue is in prime.



SUCH A PARCEL OF ROGUES IN A NATION.

Slow.

TUNE—"Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation."



What force or guile could not subdue,
 Through many warlike ages,

Is wrought now by a coward few,
 For hireling traitor's wages.
 The English steel we could disclaim,
 Secure in valour's station;
 But English gold has been our bane—
 Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!

O would, ere I had seen the day
 That Treason thus could sell us,
 My auld grey head had lien in clay,
 Wi' Bruce and loyal Wallace!
 But pith and power, till my last hour,
 I'll mak this declaration;
 We're bought and sold for English gold—
 Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!



JOCKY FOL AND JENNY FAIR.

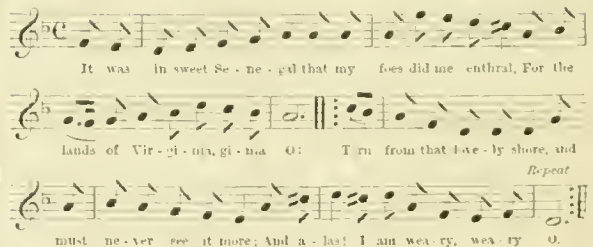
LET love sparkle in her ee,
 Let her loe nae man but me;
 That's the tocher guid I prize,
 There the lover's treasure lies.*



THE SLAVE'S LAMENT.

Slow.

TUNE—"The Slave's Lament."



All on that charming coast is no bitter snow and frost,
 Like the lands of Virginia, ginia O;
 There streams for ever flow, and the flowers for ever blow
 And alas! I am weary, weary O;
 There streams for ever flow, and flowers for ever blow,
 And alas! I am weary, weary O.

The burden I must bear, while the cruel scourge I fear,
 In the lands of Virginia, ginia O;
 And I think on friends most dear, with the bitter, bitter tear,
 And alas! I am weary, weary O;
 And I think on friends most dear, with the bitter, bitter tear,
 And alas! I am weary, weary O.

* The above verse was thrown by Burns into a song by Ramsay.

COMING THROUGH THE RYE.

VERY SLOW.

TUNE—"Coming Through the Rye."

Com - ing through the rye, poor bo - dy, Com - ing through the rye,
 She draig - let a' her pet - ti - coat - ie Com - ing through the rye.
 CHORUS—Jen - ny's a' wat, poor bo - dy, Jen - ny's sel - dom dry; She
 draiglet a' her pet - ti - coat - ie Com - ing through the rye.

Gin a body meet a body
 Coming through the rye,
 Gin a body kiss a body,
 Need a body cry?
 Jenny's a' wat, &c.

Gin a body meet a body
 Coming through the glen,
 Gin a body kiss a body,
 Need the world ken?
 Jenny's a' wat, &c.



YOUNG JAMIE, PRIDE OF A' THE PLAIN.

SLOWISH.

"The Carlin o' the Glen."

Young Jam - ie, pride of a' the plain, Sae gal - lant and sae
 gay a swain, Through a our las - ses he did rove, And reign'd
 re - sist - less King of Love. But now, wi' sighs and start - ing
 tears, He strays among the woods and breers; Or in the
 glens and rock - y caves, His sad com - plain - ing dow - ie raves;

"I wha sae late did range and rove,
 And chang'd with every moon my love,
 I little thought the time was near,
 Repentance I should buy sae dear.

VOL. II.

"The slighted maids my torments see,
 And laugh at a' the pangs I dree;
 While she, my cruel, scornful Fair,
 Forbids me e'er to see her mair."



THE CARDIN' O'T, THE SPINNIN' O'T.

TUNE—"Salt Fish and Dumplings."

I coft a stane o' has - lock woo, To make a wab to John - ie, o't;
 For John - ie is my on - ly Jo, I loe him best of on - ie yet.
 CHORUS—The card - in' o't, the spin - nin' o't, The warp - in' o't, the winnin' o't;
 When il - ka dill cost me a great, The tailor saw the lynnin' o't.

For though his locks be lyart grey,
 And though his brow be beld aboon;
 Yet I hae seen him on a day,
 The pride of a' the parishen.
 The cardin' o't, &c.



THE HIGHLAND LADDIE.

SLOWISH BUT CHEERFUL.

TUNE—"If thou It Play me fair Play."

"The bon - niest lad that eer I saw, Bon - nie lad - die, High - land lad - die,
 Wore a plaid, and was fu' braw, Bon - nie High - land lad - die.
 On his head a bon - net blue, Bon - nie lad - die, High - land lad - die;
 His loy - al heart was firm and true, Bon - nie High - land lad - die."

"Trumpets sound, and canons roar,
 Bonnie lassie, Lowland lassie;
 And a' the hills wi' echoes roar,
 Bonnie Lowland lassie."

Glory, honour, now invite,
Bonnie lassie, Lowland lassie,
For freedom and my king to fight,
Bonnie Lowland lassie."

"The sun a backward course shall take,
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie,
Ere aught thy manly courage shake,
Bonnie Highland laddie.
Go! for yourself procure renown,
Bonnie laddie, Highland laddie;
And for your lawful king, his crown,
Bonnie Highland laddie."



MY NATIVE LAND SAE FAR AWA.

TUNE—"Dalkeith Maiden Bridge."

O sad and hea-vy should I part, But for her sake, sae far a-wa;
Un-know-ing what my way may thwart, My na-tive land sae far a-wa,
Thou that of a' things Mak-er art, That formed this Fair sae far a-wa,
Gie bod-y strength, then I'll ne'er start At this my way sae far a-wa.

How true is love to pure desert!
Like mine for her sae far awa';
And nocht shall heal my bosom's smart,
While, oh, she is sae far awa!
Nane other love, nane other dart,
I feel but her's sae far awa;
But fairer never touch'd a heart
Than her's, the Fair, sae far awa.



BANNOCKS O' BEAR MEAL.

TUNE—"The Killogie"

Chorus—Ban-nocks o' bear meal, Ban-nocks o' bar-ley Here's to the High-
land-ma'n's ban-nocks o' bar-ley. Song—Wha, in a brulzie, will first cry "a
far-ley?" Ne-ver the lads wi' The ban-nocks o' bar-ley!

Wha, in his wae days,
Were loyal to 'Charlie I
Wha but the lads wi' the
Bannocks o' barley!
Bannocks o' bear meal, &c.



I 'LL AVE CA' IN BY YON TOWN.

LIVELY

TUNE—"I'll Gang nae Mair to yon Town."

Chorus—I'll aye ca' in by yon town, And by you gar-den-green a gain.
I'll aye ca' in by yon town, And see my Lon-nie Jean a-gain.
Song—There's nane sail ken, there's nane sail guess, What brings me back the gate a-gain,
But she, my fair-est faith-fu' lass, And stow-lins we sail meet a-gain.

She'll wander by the aiken tree,
When trystin' time draws near again;
And when her lovely form I see,
O haith! she's doubly dear again.
I'll aye ca' in, &c.



IT WAS A' FOR OUR RIGHTFU' KING.

TUNE—"It was a' for our Rightfu' King."

It was a' for our right-fu' king We left fair Scot-land's
Strand; It was a' for our right-fu' king We e'er
saw Ir-ish land, my dear; We e'er saw Ir-ish land.

Now a' is done that men can do,
And a' is done in vain;
My Love and Native Land fareweel,
For I maun cross the main, my dear,
For I maun cross the main.

He turn'd him right and round about,
Upon the Irish shore;
And gae his bridle reins a shake,
With adieu for evermore, my dear,
And adieu for evermore.

The soger frae the wars returns,
The sailor frae the main;
And I hae parted frae my love,
Never to meet again, my dear,
Never to meet again.

When day is gane, and night is come,
And a' folk bound to sleep;
I think on him that's far awa,
The lee-lang night and weep, my dear,
The lee-lang night and weep.



SWEETEST MAY.

SlOW is B.

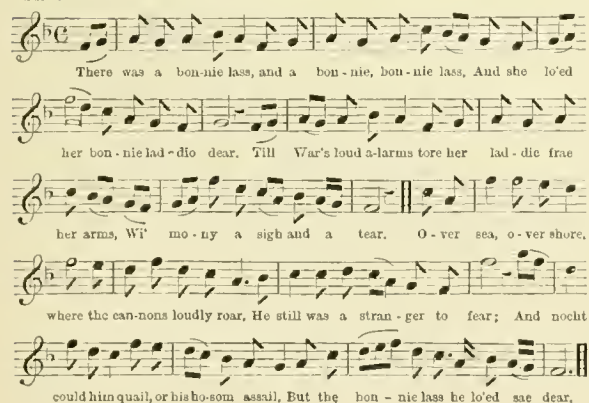


Proof o' shot to birth or money,
Not the wealthy, but the bonnie,
Not high-born, but noble-minded,
In love's silken bands can bind it!



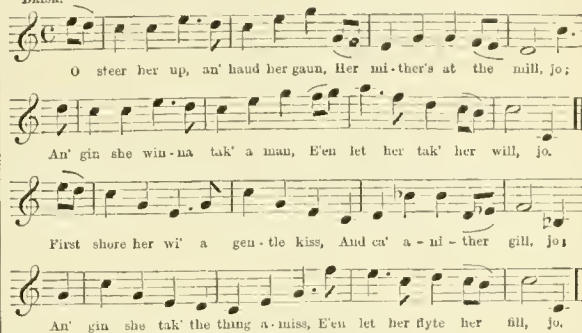
THERE WAS A BONNIE LASS.

SlOW.



O STEER HER UP AN' HAUD HER GAUN.

BRISK.



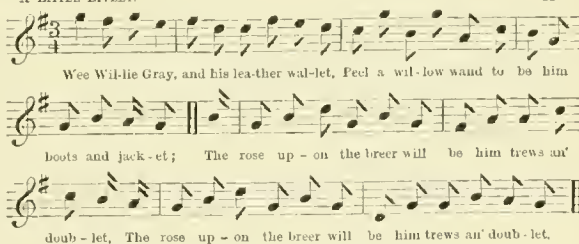
O steer her up, and be na blate,
An' gin she tak' it ill, jo,
Then leave the lassie till her fate,
And time nae langer spill, jo:
Ne'er break your heart for ae rebute,
But think upon it still, jo,
That gin the lassie winna do 't,
Ye 'll find anither will, jo.



WEE WILLIE GRAY.

A LITTLE LIVELY.

TUNE—"Wee Totum Fogg."

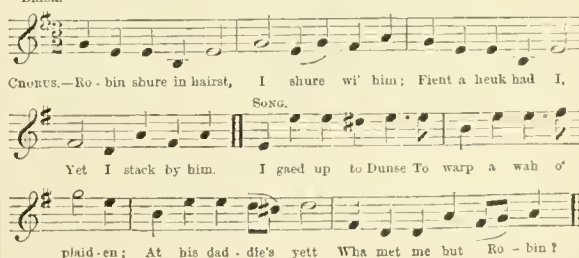


Wee Willie Gray, and his leather wallet,
Twice a lily-flower will be him sark and cravat;
Feathers of a flee wad feather up his bonnet,
Feathers of a flee wad feather up his bonnet.



ROBIN SHURE IN HAIRST.

BRISK.



Was na Robin bauld,
Though I was a cottar,
I'lay'd me sic a trick,
An' me the Ellers dochter!
Robin shure, &c.

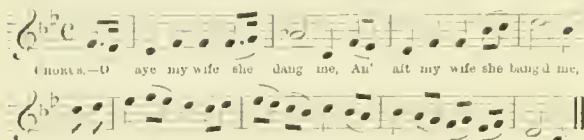
Robin promis'd me
A' my winter vittle;
Fient haet he had but three
Guse-feathers and a whittle!
Robin shure, &c.



O AYE MY WIFE SHE DANG ME.

A LITTLE LIVELY.

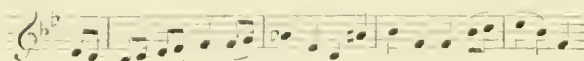
TUNE—"My Wife she Dang Me."



CHORUS.—O aye my wife she dang me, An' a' my wife she tang'd me,



If ye gie a wo-man a' her will, Guid fath! she'll soon o'er-gang ye.



On peace an' rest my mind was bent, And, fool I was! I mar-ried;



But ne-ver hon-est man's in-tent Sae curs-ed-ly mis-car-ried.

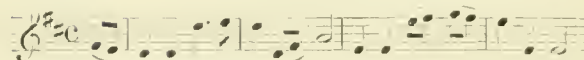
Some sairie comfort at the last,
When a' thir days are done, man,
My "pains o' hell" on earth is past,
I'm sure o' bliss aboon, man.
O aye my wife, &c.



O GUID ALE COMES.

LIVELY

TUNE—"The Bottom of the Punch Bowl."



CHORUS.—O guid ale comes and guid ale goes; Guid ale gars me sell my hose,



Sell my hose, and pawn my shoon; Guid ale keeps my heart a-boon!



SONG.—I had sax ow-sen in a plough, And they drew a weel enough:



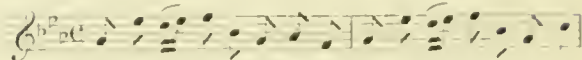
I self'd them a' just ane by ane, Guid ale keeps the heart a-boon!

Guid ale hauds me bare and busy,
Gars me moop wi' the servant hizzie,
Stand i' the stool when I hae dunc
Guid ale keeps the heart aboon!
O guid ale comes, &c.

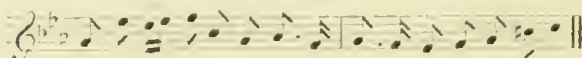


CROWDIE EVER MAIR.

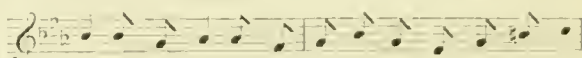
A LITTLE LIVELY.



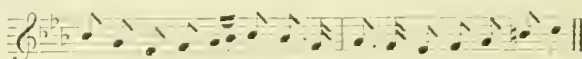
O that I had ne'er been mar-ried, I wad ne-ver hae hae care,



Now I've got a ten wife an' weans, An' they cry "Crow die ev-er mair."



CHORUS—Ane crow-die, twice crow-die, Three times crow-die in a day;



Gin ye "Crow die" o'-ny mair, Ye'll crow-die a' my meal a-way.

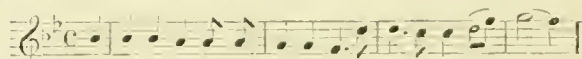
Waefu' Want and Hunger fley me,
Glowrin' by the hallan en';
Sair I fecht them at the door,
But aye I'm cerie they come ben.
Ane crowdie, &c.



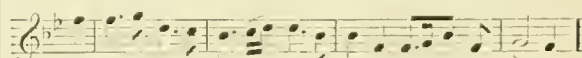
THE HIGHLAND WIDOW'S LAMENT.

VERY SLOW

TUNE—"Gaelic Air."



Oh I am come to the low Coun-trie, Och-on, Och-on, Och-rie!



With-out a pen-ny in my purse, To buy a meal to me.

It was na sae in the Highland hills,
Ochon, Ochon, Ochrie!
Nae woman in the Country wide.
Sae happy was as me.

For then I had a score o' kye,
Ochon, Ochon, Ochrie!
Feeding on yon hill sae high,
And giving milk to me.

And there I had three score o' yowes,
Ochon, Ochon, Ochrie!
Skipping on yon bonnie knowes,
And casting woo to me.

I was the happiest of a' the Clan,
Sair, sair may I repine;
For Donald was the brawest man,
And Donald he was mine.

Till Charlie Stewart cam at last,
Sae far to set us free;
My Donald's arm was wanted then,
For Scotland and for me.

Their wae fu' fate what need I tell,
Right to the wrang did yield;
My Donald and his Country fell,
Upon Culloden field.

Ochon! O Donald, oh!
Ochon, Ochon, Ochrie!
Nae woman in the world wide
Sae wretched now as me.



DOUBTFULLY ATTRIBUTED TO BURNS.

ON PASTORAL POETRY.

HAIL, Poesie! thou Nymph reserved,
In chase o' thee, what crowds hae swerved
Frae common-sense, or sunk emerved
'Mang heaps o' clavers;
And och! owre aft thy joes hae starved,
Mid a' thy favours!

Say, Lassie, why thy train amang,
While loud, the trump's heroic clang,
And sock or buskin skelp alang
To death or marriage;
Scaree ane has tried the shepherd-sang
But wi' miscarriage!

In Homer's craft Joek Milton thrives;
Æschylus' pen Will Shakspeare drives;
Wee Pope, the knurlin', 'till him rives
Horatian fame;
In thy sweet sang, Barbauld, survives
E'en Sappho's flame.

But thee, Theocritus, wha matches?
They're no herd's ballats, Maro's catches;
Squire Pope but larks his skinklin' patches
O' heathen tatters:
I pass by hundreds, nameless wretches,
That ape their betters.

In this braw age o' wit and lear,
Will nane the Shepherd's whistle mair

Blaw sweetly in its native air
And rural grace;
And wi' the far-famed Grecian share
A rival place?

Yes, there is ane, a Scottish callan—
There's ane; come forrit, honest Allan!
Thou need na jouk behind the hallan,
A chiel sae clever;
The teeth o' time may gnaw Tantallan,
But thou's for ever!

Thou paints auld nature to the mines,
In thy sweet Caledonian lines;
Nae gowden stream through myrtles twines,
Where Philomel,
While nightly breezes sweep the vines,
Her griefs will tell!

In gowany glens the burnie strays,
Where bonnie lassies bleach their claes;
Or trots by hazelly shaws and braes,
Wi' hawthorns grey,
Where blackbirds join the shepherd's lays
At close o' day.

Thy rural loves are nature's sel';
Nae bombast spates o' nonsense swell;
Nae snap conceits, but that sweet spell
O' witchin' love;
That charm that can the strongest quell,
The sternest move.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THOMSON:

INCLUDING THE

SONGS CONTRIBUTED TO THOMSON'S COLLECTION.

No. I.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, *September*, 1792.

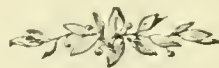
SIR,

For some years past I have, with a friend or two, employed many leisure hours in selecting and collating the most favourite of our national melodies for publication. We have engaged Pleyel, the most agreeable composer living, to put accompaniments to these, and also to compose an instrumental prelude and conclusion to each air, the better to fit them for concerts, both public and private. To render this work perfect, we are desirous to have the poetry improved, wherever it seems unworthy of the music; and that it is so in many instances is allowed by every one conversant with our musical collections. The editors of these seem in general to have depended on the music proving an excuse for the verses; and hence some charming melodies are united to mere nonsense and doggerel, while others are accommodated with rhymes so loose and indelicate as cannot be sung in decent company. To remove this reproach would be an easy task to the author of "The Cotter's Saturday Night;" and, for the honour of Caledonia, I would fain hope he may be induced to take up the pen. If so, we shall be enabled to present the public with a collection infinitely more interesting than any that has yet appeared, and acceptable to all persons of taste, whether they wish for correct melodies, delicate accompaniments, or characteristic verses. We will esteem your poetical assistance a particular favour, besides paying any reasonable price you shall please to demand for it. Profit is quite a secondary consideration with us, and we are resolved to spare neither pains nor expense on the publication. Tell me frankly, then, whether you will

devote your leisure to writing twenty or twenty-five songs suited to the particular melodies which I am prepared to send you. A few songs, exceptionable only in some of their verses, I will likewise submit to your consideration; leaving it to you, either to mend these, or make new songs in their stead. It is superfluous to assure you that I have no intention to displace any of the sterling old songs; those only will be removed which appear quite silly or absolutely indecent. Even these shall all be examined by Mr. Burns, and if he is of opinion that any of them are deserving of the music, in such case no divorce shall take place.

Relying on the letter accompanying this, to be forgiven for the liberty I have taken in addressing you, I am, with great esteem, Sir, your most obedient humble servant,

G. THOMSON.



No. II.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

DUMFRIES, 16th *September*, 1792.

SIR,

I HAVE just this moment got your letter. As the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have, strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm. Only, don't hurry me: "Deil tak' the hindmost" is by no means the *cri de guerre* of my muse. Will you, as I am inferior to none of you in enthusiastic attachment to the poetry and music of old Caledonia, and,

since you request it, have cheerfully promised my mite of assistance—will you let me have a list of your airs, with the first line of the printed verses you intend for them, that I may have an opportunity of suggesting any alteration that may occur to me? You know 'tis in the way of my trade; still leaving you, gentlemen, the undoubted right of publishers, to approve or reject, at your pleasure, for your own publication. Apropos! if you are for English verses, there is, on my part, an end of the matter. Whether in the simplicity of the ballad, or the pathos of the song, I can only hope to please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue. English verses, particularly the works of Scotsmen, that have merit, are certainly very eligible. "Tweedside;" "Ah! the poor shepherd's mournful fate!" "Ah! Chloris, could I now but sit," &c., you cannot mend; but such insipid stuff as "To Fanny fair could I impart," &c., usually set to "The Mill, Mill O," is a disgrace to the collections in which it has already appeared, and would doubly disgrace a collection that will have the very superior merit of yours. But more of this in the farther prosecution of the business, if I am called on for my strictures and amendments—I say, amendments; for I will not alter except where I myself at least think that I amend.

As to any remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c., would be downright prostitution of soul! A proof of each of the songs that I compose or amend, I shall receive as a favour. In the rustic phrase of the season, "Gude speed the work!"

I am, Sir, your very humble servant,
R. BURNS.

P.S.—I have some particular reasons for wishing my interference to be known as little as possible.



No. III.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 13th October, 1792.

DEAR SIR,

I RECEIVED with much satisfaction your pleasant and obliging letter, and I return my warmest acknowledgments for the enthusiasm with which you have entered into our undertaking. We have now no doubt of being able to produce a collection highly deserving of public attention in all respects.

I agree with you in thinking English verses, that have

merit, very eligible, wherever new verses are necessary; because the English becomes every year more and more the language of Scotland; but if you mean that no English verses, except those by Scottish authors, ought to be admitted, I am half inclined to differ from you. I should consider it unpardonable to sacrifice one good song in the Scottish dialect, to make room for English verses; but if we can select a few excellent ones, suited to the unprovided or ill-provided airs, would it not be the very bigotry of literary patriotism to reject such, merely because the authors were born south of the Tweed? Our sweet air, "My Nannie O," which in the collections is joined to the poorest stuff that Allan Ramsay ever wrote, beginning, "While some for pleasure pawn their health," answers so finely to Dr. Percy's beautiful song, "O Nancy, wilt thou go with me," that one would think he wrote it on purpose for the air. However, it is not at all our wish to confine you to English verses; you shall freely be allowed a sprinkling of your native tongue, as you elegantly express it; and moreover, we will patiently wait your own time. One thing only I beg, which is, that however gay and sportive the muse may be, she may always be decent. Let her not write what beauty would blush to speak, nor wound that charming delicacy which forms the most precious dowry of our daughters. I do not conceive the song to be the most proper vehicle for witty and brilliant conceits; simplicity, I believe, should be its prominent feature; but in some of our songs the writers have confounded simplicity with coarseness and vulgarity; although between the one and the other, as Dr. Beattie well observes, there is as great a difference as between a plain suit of clothes and a bundle of rags. The humorous ballad, or pathetic complaint, is best suited to our artless melodies; and more interesting, indeed, in all songs, than the most pointed wit, dazzling descriptions, and flowery fancies.

With these trite observations I send you eleven of the songs, for which it is my wish to substitute others of your writing. I shall soon transmit the rest, and at the same time, a prospectus of the whole collection: and you may believe we will receive any hints that you are so kind as to give for improving the work, with the greatest pleasure and thankfulness.

I remain, dear Sir, &c.



No. IV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

MY DEAR SIR,

LET me tell you that you are too fastidious in your ideas of songs and ballads. I own that your criticisms are just; the songs you specify in your list have, all but

one, the faults you remark in them; but who shall mend the matter! Who shall rise up and say—Go to, I will make a better! For instance, on reading over the “Lea-

rig,” I immediately set about trying my hand on it, and after all, I could make nothing more of it than the following, which, Heaven knows, is poor enough:—



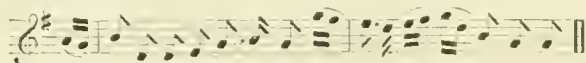
MY AIN KIND DEARIE, O.

ALLEGRETTO.

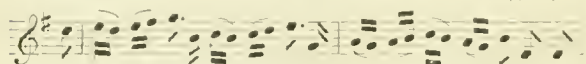
TUNE—"The Lea-Rig."



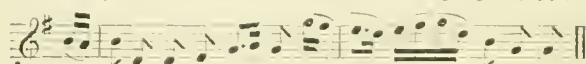
When o'er the hill the eastern star, Tells bughtin' time is near, my Jo!



And ow-sou frae the fur-row'd field, Re-turn sae dowf and weary, O;



Down by the burn, where scented birks* Wi' dew are ling-ing clear, my Jo;



I'll meet thee on the lea-rie, My ain kind dearie, O!

In mirkest glen at midnight hour,
I'd rove and ne'er be eerie, O,
If through that glen I gae to thee,
My ain kind dearie, O.

* MS. variation:—

"Down by the burn where birken-buds."

Although the night were ne'er sae wild,†
And I were ne'er sae wearie, O,
I'd meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind dearie, O!‡

Your observation, as to the aptitude of Dr. Percy's

† "In the copy transmitted to Mr. Thomson, instead of *wild*, was inserted *wet*. But in one of the manuscripts, probably written afterwards, *wet* was changed into *wild*—evidently a great improvement. The lovers might meet on the lea-rig, although the night were ne'er so *wild*; that is, although the summer-wind blew, the sky lowered, and the thunder murmured: such circumstances might render their meeting still more interesting. But if the night were actually wet, why should they meet on the lea-rig? On a wet night the imagination cannot contemplate their situation there with any complacency. Tibullus, and after him Hammond, has conceived a happier situation for lovers on a wet night. Probably Burns had in his mind the verse of an old Scottish Song, in which *wet* and *weary* are naturally conjoined:—

'When my ploughman comes hame at e'en
He's often wet and weary;
Cast aff the wet, pnt on the dry,
And gae to bed, my deary.'—CHERIE.

‡ At the suggestion of Mr. Thomson, Burns added another stanza to this song—see Letter No. VIII.

ballad on the air "Nannie O," is just. It is, besides, perhaps the most beautiful ballad in the English language. But let me remark to you that, in the sentiment and style of our Scottish airs, there is a pastoral simplicity, a something that one may call the Doric style and dialect of vocal music, to which a dash of our native tongue and manners is particularly, nay peculiarly, apposite. For this reason, and, upon my honour, for this reason alone, I am of opinion (but, as I have told you before, my opinion is yours, freely yours, to approve or reject as you please) that my ballad of "Nannie O" might, perhaps, do for one set of verses to the tune. Now don't let it enter into your head that you are under any necessity of taking my verses. I have long ago made up my mind as to my own reputation in the business of authorship; and have nothing to be pleased or offended at in your adoption or rejection of my verses. Though you should reject one half of what I give you, I shall be pleased with your adopting the other half, and shall continue to serve you with the same assiduity.

In the printed copy of my "Nannie O," the name of the river is horribly prosaic. I will alter it,

"Behind yon hills where Lugar flows."

Girvan is the name of the river that suits the idea of the stanza best, but Lugar* is the most agreeable modulation of syllables.

I will soon give you a great many more remarks on this business; but I have just now an opportunity of conveying you this scrawl free of postage, an expense that it is ill able to pay: so, with my best compliments to honest Allan, Guid be wi' ye, &c.

FRIDAY NIGHT.

SATURDAY MORNING.

As I find I have still an hour to spare this morning before my conveyance goes away, I will give you "Nannie O," at length. [See vol. i. p. 16.]

Your remarks on "Ewe-bughts, Marion," are just: still it has obtained a place among our more classical Scottish songs; and, what with many beauties in its composition, and more prejudices in its favour, you will not find it easy to supplant it.

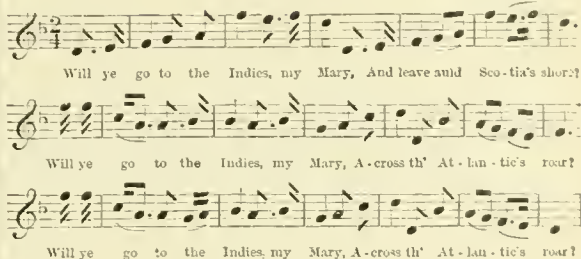
In my very early years, when I was thinking of going to the West Indies, I took the following farewell of a dear girl. It is quite trifling, and has nothing of the merits of "Ewe-bughts;" but it will fill up this page. You must know that all my earlier love-songs were the breathings of ardent passion, and though it might have been easy in after-times to have given them a polish, yet that polish to me, whose they were, and who perhaps alone cared for them, would have defaced the legend of my heart, which was so faithfully inscribed on them. Their uncounted simplicity was, as they say of wines, their race.

* Stinchar was the real name—see LIFE.

TO MARY CAMPBELL†

ANDANTE.

TUNE—"The Ewe-Bughts."



O sweet grows the lime and the orange,
And the apple on the pine;
But a' the charms o' the Indies
Can never equal thine.

I ha'e sworn by the Heavens to my Mary,
I ha'e sworn by the Heavens to be true;
And sac may the Heavens forget me,
When I forget my vow!

O plight me your faith, my Mary,
And plight me your lily-white hand;
O plight me your faith, my Mary;
Before I leave Scotia's strand.

We ha'e plighted our troth, my Mary,
In mutual affection to join:
And curst be the cause that shall part us!
The hour and the moment o' time!

"Galla Water," and "Auld Rob Morris," I think, will most probably be the next subject of my musings. However, even on my verses, speak out your criticisms with equal frankness. My wish is, not to stand aloft, the uncomplaining bigot of *opiniâtrêté*, but cordially to join issue with you in the furtherance of the work.



No. V.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

November 8, 1792.

If you mean, my dear Sir, that all the songs in your collection shall be poetry of the first merit, I am afraid you will find more difficulty in the undertaking than you

† Thomson did not give the above a place in his collection.

are aware of. There is a peculiar rhythmus in many of our airs, and a necessity of adapting syllables to the emphasis, or what I would call the feature-notes of the tune, that cramp the poet, and lay him under almost insuperable difficulties. For instance, in the air, "My wife's a wanton wee thing," if a few lines smooth and pretty can be adapted to it, it is all you can expect. The following were made extempore to it; and though on further study I might give you something more profound, yet it might not suit the light-horse gallop of the air so well as this random clink.

THE WINSOME WEE THING.

LIVELY.

TUNE—"My Wife's a Wanton Wee Thing."

She is a win^dsome weething, She is a hand-some weething,
She is a bon-nie weething, This sweet wee wife o' mine.
I ne-ver saw a fairer, I ne-ver lo'ed a dearer,
And nest my heart I'll wear her, For fear my jewel tine.

She is a winsome wee thing,
She is a handsome wee thing,
She is a bonnie wee thing,
This sweet wee wife o' mine.

The world's wrack we share o't,
The warstle and the care o't;
Wi' her I'll blythely bear it,
And think my lot divine.

I have just been looking over the "Collier's bonny Dochter;" and if the following rhapsody, which I composed the other day on a charming Ayrshire girl, Miss Lesley Baillie, as she passed through this place to England, will suit your taste better than the "Collier Lassie," fall on and welcome:—

BONNIE LESLEY.*

ALLEGRETTO.

TUNE—"The Collier's Bonnie Lassie."

O saw ye bon-nie Les-ley, As she gael o'er the bor-der?
She's gane, like A-lex-an-der, To spread her con-quests far-ther.

* See GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE.

To see her is to love her, And I've but her for ever,
For naught made her what she is, And ne-ver made a finer!

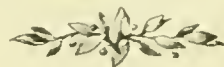
Thou art a queen, fair Lesley,
Thy subjects we, before thee:
Thou art divine, fair Lesley,
The hearts o' men adore thee.

The Deil he could na scaith thee,
Or aught that wad belang thee;
He'd look into thy bonnie face,
And say, "I canna wrang thee."

The powers aboon will tent thee,
Misfortune sha'na steer thee;
Thou'rt like themselves sae lovely,
That ill they'll ne'er let near thee.

Return again, fair Lesley,
Return to Caledonie!
That we may brag, we hae a lass
There's name again sae bonnie.

I have hitherto deferred the sublimer, more pathetic airs, until more leisure, as they will take, and deserve, a greater effort. However, they are all put into your hands, as clay into the hands of the potter, to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour. Farewell, &c.



No. VI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.



HIGHLAND MARY.

SLOW.

TUNE—"Katherine O'gie."

Ye banks, and braes, and streams around The castle o' Mont-go-mery,*
Green be your woods, and fair your flowers, Your waters ne-ver drummie!
There sim-mer first unfauld her robes, And there the lan-gest tar-ry;
For there I took the last farewel o' my sweet High-land Mary.



How sweetly bloom'd the gay green birk,
 How rich the hawthorn's blossom !
 As underneath their fragrant shade,
 I clasp'd her to my bosom !
 The golden hours, on angel wings,
 Flew o'er me and my dearie ;
 For dear to me as light and life,
 Was my sweet Highland Mary.

Wi' mony a vow, and lock'd embrace,
 Our parting was fu' tender ;
 And, pledging aft to meet again,
 We tore oursels asunder ;
 But oh ! fell death's untimely frost,
 That nipt my flower sae early !
 Now green 's the sod, and cauld 's the clay,
 That wraps my Highland Mary !

O pale, pale now those rosy lips,
 I aft ha'e kiss'd sae fondly !
 And clos'd for aye the sparkling glance
 That dwelt on me sae kindly !
 And mouldering now in silent dust,
 That heart that lo'ed me dearly !
 But still within my bosom's core,
 Shall live my Highland Mary.

14th Nov., 1792.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AGREE with you that the song, "Katherine Ogie," is very poor stuff, and unworthy, altogether unworthy, of so beautiful an air. I tried to mend it, but the awkward sound Ogie occurring so often in the rhyme, spoils every attempt at introducing sentiment into the

piece. The foregoing song pleases myself; I think it is in my happiest manner; you will see at first glance that it suits the air. The subject of the song is one of the most interesting passages of my youthful days; and I own that I should be much flattered to see the verses set to an air which would insure celebrity. Perhaps, after all, 'tis the still glowing prejudice of my heart that throws a borrowed lustre over the merits of the composition.

I have partly taken your idea of "Auld Rob Morris." I have adopted the two first verses, and am going on with the song on a new plan, which promises pretty well. I take up one or another, just as the bee of the moment buzzes in my bonnet-lug; and do you, *sans ceremonie*, make what use you choose of the productions. Adieu, &c.



No. VII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, Nov., 1792.

DEAR SIR,

I WAS just going to write to you, that on meeting with your Nannie I had fallen violently in love with her. I thank you, therefore, for sending the charming rustic to me, in the dress you wish her to appear before the public. She does you great credit, and will soon be admitted into the best company.

I regret that your song for the "Lea-rig" is so short. The air is easy, soon sung, and very pleasing; so that, if the singer stops at the end of two stanzas, it is a pleasure lost ere it is well possessed.

Although a dash of our native tongue and manners is doubtless peculiarly congenial and appropriate to our melodies, yet I shall be able to present a considerable number of the very flowers of English song, well adapted to those melodies, which, in England at least, will be the means of recommending them to still greater attention than they have procured there. But you will observe, my plan is that every air shall, in the first place, have verses wholly by Scottish poets; and that those of English writers shall follow as additional songs, for the choice of the singer.

What you say of the "Ewe-bughts" is just; I admire it, and never meant to supplant it. All I requested was, that you would try your hand on some of the inferior stanzas, which are apparently no part of the original song; but this I do not urge, because the song is of sufficient length though those inferior stanzas be omitted, as they will be by the singer of taste. You must not think I expect all the songs to be of superlative merit; that were

an unreasonable expectation. I am sensible that no poet can sit down doggedly to pen verses, and succeed well at all times.

I am highly pleased with your humorous and amorous rhapsody on "Bonnie Lesley;" it is a thousand times better than the "Collier's Lassie!" "The Deil he couldna scaith thee," &c., is an eccentric and happy thought. Do you not think, however, that the names of such old heroes as Alexander sound rather queer, unless in pompous or mere burlesque verse? Instead of the line, "And never made anither," I would humbly suggest, "And ne'er made sic anither;" and I would fain have you substitute some other line for "Return to Caledonie," in the last verse, because I think this alteration of the orthography and of the sound of Caledonia distiguishes the word, and renders it Hudibrastic.

Of the other song, "My wife's a winsome wee thing," I think the first eight lines very good, but I do not admire the other eight, because four of them are a bare repetition of the first verse. I have been trying to spin a stanza, but could make nothing better than the following: do you mend it, or as Yorick did with the love-letter, whip it up in your own way.

O leeze me on my wee thing,
My bonnie blythsome wee thing;
Sae lang's I ha'e my wee thing,
I'll think my lot divine.

Tho' world's care we share o't,
And may see meikle mair o't:
Wi' her I'll blythely bear it,
And ne'er a word repine.

You perceive, my dear Sir, I avail myself of the liberty which you condescend to allow me, by speaking freely what I think. Be assured it is not my disposition to pick out the faults of any poem or picture I see; my first and chief object is to discover and be delighted with the beauties of the piece. If I sit down to examine critically, and at leisure, what perhaps you have written in haste, I may happen to observe careless lines, the re-perusal of which might lead you to improve them. The wren will often see what has been overlooked by the eagle.

I remain yours faithfully, &c.

P.S.—Your verses upon Highland Mary are just come to hand; they breathe the genuine spirit of poetry, and, like the music, will last for ever. Such verses united to such an air, with the delicate harmony of Pleyel superadded, might form a treat worthy of being presented to Apollo himself. I have heard the sad story of your Mary; you always seem inspired when you write of her,

No. VIII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

DUMFRIES, 1st Dec., 1792.

YOUR alterations of my "Nannie O" are perfectly right. So are those of "My wife's a wanton wee thing." Your alteration of the second stanza is a positive improvement. Now, my dear Sir, with the freedom which characterizes our correspondence, I must not, cannot alter "Bonnie Lesley." You are right, the word "Alexander" makes the line a little uncouth, but I think the thought is pretty. Of Alexander, beyond all other heroes, it may be said in the sublime language of scripture, that "he went forth conquering and to conquer."

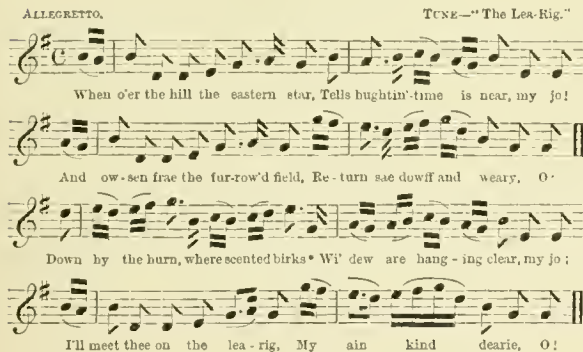
"For Nature made her what she is,
And never made anither" (such a person as she is).

This is, in my opinion, more poetical than "Ne'er made sic anither." However, it is immaterial; make it either way. "Caledonie," I agree with you, is not so good a word as could be wished, though it is sanctioned in three or four instances by Allan Ramsay; but I cannot help it. In short, that species of stanza is the most difficult that I have ever tried.

The "Lea-rig" is as follows:—

MY AIN KIND DEARIE, O.

ALLEGRETTO. TUNE—"The Lea-Rig."



When o'er the hill the eastern star, Tells bughin'-time is near, my jo!

And ow-sen frae the fur-row'd field, Re-turn sae dowif and weary, O.

Down by the burn, where scented birks * Wi' dew are hang-ing clear, my jo;

I'll meet thee on the lea-rig, My ain kind dearie, O!

In mirkest glen, at midnight hour,
I'd rove and ne'er be eerie, O,
If through that glen I gaed to thee,
My ain kind dearie, O!
Although the night were ne'er sae wild,
And I were ne'er sae weary, O,
I'd meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind dearie, O!

The hunter lo'es the morning sun,
To rouse the mountain deer, my jo;

At noon the fisher seeks the glen,
Along the burn to steer, my jo;
Gie me the hour of gloaming grey,
It maks my heart sae cheery, O,
To meet thee on the lea-rig,
My ain kind dearie, O!

I am interrupted.

Yours, &c.

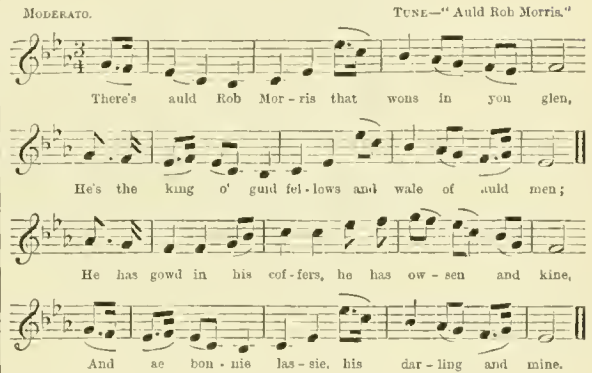


IX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

AULD ROB MORRIS.*

MODERATO. TUNE—"Auld Rob Morris."



There's auld Rob Mor-ris that wons in you glen,
He's the king o' gund fel-lows and wale of auld men;
He has gowd in his cof-fers, he has ow-sen and kine,
And ae bon-nie las-sie, his dar-ling and mine.

She's fresh as the morning, the fairest in May;
She's sweet as the evening among the new hay;
As blythe and as artless as the lambs on the lea,
And dear to my heart as the light to my e'e.

But O! she's an heiress, auld Robin 's a laird,
And my daddie has nought but a cot-house and yard;
A wooer like me maunna hope to come speed,
The wounds I must hide that will soon be my dead.

The day comes to me, but delight brings me nane;
The night comes to me, but my rest it is gane;
I wander my lane like a night-troubled ghaist,
And I sigh as my heart it wad burst in my breast.

O had she but been of a lower degree,
I then might ha'e hop'd she'd ha'e smil'd upon me!
O, how past describing had then been my bliss,
As now my distraction no words can express!

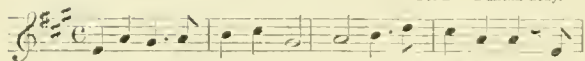
* "The first two lines are from an old ballad—the rest is wholly original."—CURRIE.



DUNCAN GRAY.*

LIVELY.

TUNE—"Duncan Gray."



Duncan Gray cam' here to woo, Ha, ha, the wooing o't! On



bly the Yule night when we were fu', Ha, ha, the wooing o't!



Maggie coost her head fu' heich, Look'd asklent, and un-co skeigh,



Gait poor Duncan stand a-beigh; Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Duncan fleel'd, and Duncan pray'd,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't;

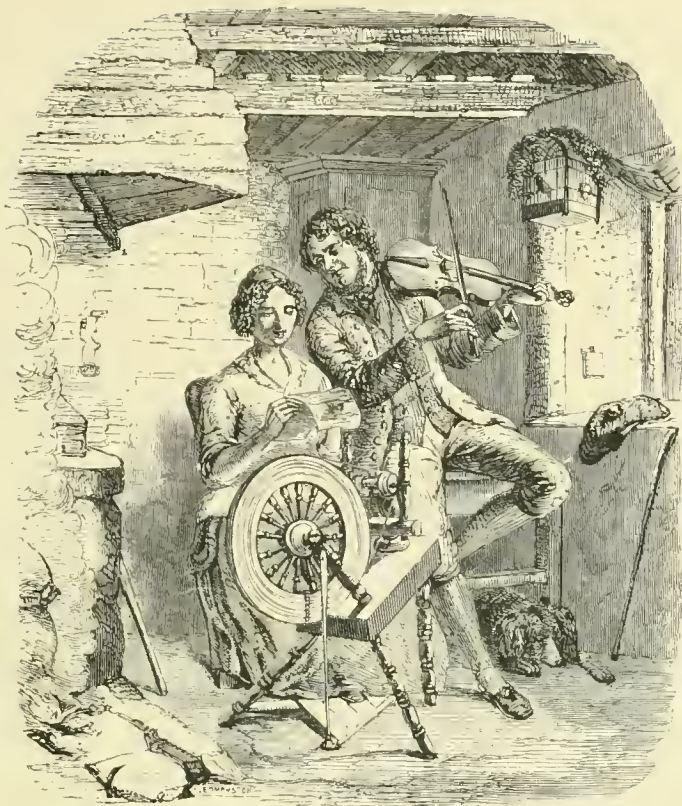
* "This has nothing in common with the old licentious ballad of Duncan Gray but the first line, and part of the third. The rest is wholly original."—CURRIE.

Meg was deaf as Ailsa Craig, †
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.
Duncan sigh'd baith out and in,
Grat his een baith bleert and blin',
Spak' o' lowpin' o'er a linn;
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Time and chance are but a tide,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't;
Slighted love is sair to bide,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.
Shall I, like a fool, quoth he,
For a haughty hizzie die?
She may gae to—France for me!
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

How it comes let doctors tell,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't,
Meg grew sick—as he grew hale,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

† A well-known rock in the Firth of Clyde.



Something in her bosom wrings,
For relief a sigh she brings;
And O, her een, they spak' sic things!
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Duncan was a lad o' grace,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't,
Maggie's was a piteous case,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.
Duncan couldna be her death,
Swelling pity smoor'd his wrath;
Now they're crouse and canty baith,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

4th December, 1792.

The foregoing I submit, my dear Sir, to your judgment. Acquit them or condemn them, as seemeth good in your sight. Duncan Gray is that kind of light-horse gallop of an air which precludes sentiment. The ludicrous is its ruling feature.

* Jean Lorimer, of Kemmis-hall in Kirkmahoe, is said to have been the subject of these verses. "I have been informed," says Chambers, "that Burns wrote this song in consequence of hearing a gentleman (now a respectable citizen of Edinburgh) sing the old homely ditty, which gives name to the tune, with an effect which made him regret

No. X.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

O POORTITH CAULD AND RESTLESS LOVE.*

VERY SLOW.

TUNE—"I had a Horse, and I had nae mair."

O poortith cauld, and restless love, Ye wreck my peace between ye;
Yet poortith a' I could forgive, An' 'twere na for my Jeanie.
Oh why should Fate sic pleasure have, Life's dearest bands un-twin-ing?
Or why sae sweet a flower as love, De-pend on Fortune's shin-ing?

that such pathetic music should be united to such unsentimental poetry. The meeting, I have been further informed, where this circumstance took place, was held in the Poet's favourite tavern, *Johnnie Dowie's*, in the Lawnmarket, Edinburgh; and there, at a subsequent meeting, the new song was also sung for the first time, by the same individual."

This world's wealth when I think on,
Its pride and a' the lave o't;
Fie, fie on silly coward man,
That he should be the slave o't!
Or why should fate, &c.

Her een sae bonnie blue betray
How she repays my passion;
But prudence is her o'erword aye,
She talks of rank and fashion.
O why should fate, &c

O wha can prudence think upon,
And sic a lassie by him?
O wha can prudence think upon,
And sae in love as I am?
O why should fate, &c.

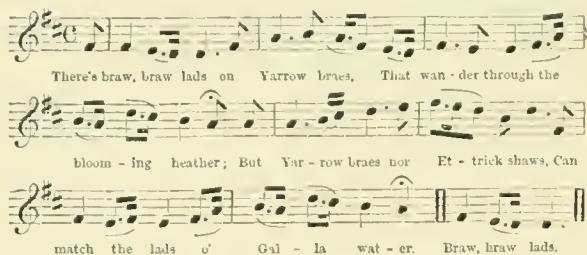
How blest the humble cotter's fate!²
He woos his simple dearie;
The sillie bogles, wealth and state,
Can never make them eerie.
O why should fate, &c.



GALLA WATER.

VERY SLOW

TUNE—"Galla Water."



But there is ane, a secret ane,
Aboon them a' I lo'e him better;
And I'll be his, and he'll be mine,
The bonnie lad o' Galla Water.

Although his daddie was nae laird,
And though I ha'e na meikle tocher;
Yet, rich in kindest, truest love,
We'll tent our flocks by Galla Water.

It ne'er was wealth, it ne'er was wealth,
That coft contentment, peace, or pleasure;
The bands and bliss o' mutual love,
O that's the chiefest world's treasure!

January, 1793.

Many returns of the season to you, my dear Sir. How comes on your publication? Will these two foregoing be

* "The wild-wood Indian's fate" in the original MS.

of any service to you? I should like to know what songs you print to each tune, besides the verses to which it is set. In short, I would wish to give you my opinion on all the poetry you publish. You know it is my trade, and a man in the way of his trade may suggest useful hints, that escape men of much superior parts and endowments in other things.

If you meet with my dear and much-valued Cunningham, greet him in my name with the compliments of the season.

Yours, &c.



No. XI.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 20th January, 1793.

You make me happy, my dear Sir, and thousands will be happy to see the charming songs you have sent me. Many merry returns of the season to you, and may you long continue, among the sons and daughters of Caledonia, to delight them and to honour yourself.

The four last songs with which you favoured me, viz., "Auld Rob Morris," "Duncan Gray," "Galla Water," and "Cauld Kail," are admirable. Duncan is indeed a lad of grace, and his humour will endear him to every body.

The distracted lover in "Auld Rob," and the happy shepherdess in "Galla Water," exhibit an excellent contrast: they speak from genuine feeling, and powerfully touch the heart.

The number of songs which I had originally in view was limited; but I now resolve to include every Scotch air and song worth singing, leaving none behind but mere gleanings, to which the publishers of *omnegatherum* are welcome. I would rather be the editor of a collection from which nothing could be taken away, than of one to which nothing could be added. We intend presenting the subscribers with two beautiful stroke engravings—the one characteristic of the plaintive, and the other of the lively songs; and I have Dr. Beattie's promise of an essay upon the subject of our national music, if his health will permit him to write it. As a number of our songs have doubtless been called forth by particular events, or by the charms of peerless damsels, there must be many curious anecdotes relating to them.

The late Mr. Tytler of Woodhouselee, I believe, knew more of this than any body, for he joined to the pursuits of an antiquary a taste for poetry, besides being a man of the world, and possessing an enthusiasm for music beyond

† Tytler, well known as a defender of Mary Queen of Scots.

most of his contemporaries. He was quite pleased with this plan of mine, for I may say it has been solely managed by me, and we had several long conversations about it when it was in embryo. If I could simply mention the name of the heroine of each song, and the incident which occasioned the verses, it would be gratifying. Pray, will you send me any information of this sort, as well with regard to your own songs, as the old ones?

To all the favourite songs of the plaintive or pastoral kind will be joined the delicate accompaniments, &c., of Pleyel. To those of the comic and humorous class, I think accompaniments scarcely necessary; they are chiefly fitted for the conviviality of the festive board, and a tuneful voice, with a proper delivery of the words, renders them perfect. Nevertheless, to these I propose adding bass accompaniments, because then they are fitted either for singing or for instrumental performance, when there happens to be no singer. I mean to employ our right trusty friend, Mr. Clarke, to set the bass to these, which he assures me he will do *con amore*, and with much greater attention than he ever bestowed on any thing of the kind. But for this last class of airs I will not attempt to find more than one set of verses.

That eccentric bard, Peter Pindar, has started I know not how many difficulties about writing for the airs I sent to him, because of the peculiarity of their measure, and the trammels they impose on his flying Pegasus. I subjoin for your perusal the only one I have yet got from him, being for the fine air "Lord Gregory." The Scots verses printed with that air are taken from the middle of an old ballad, called "The Lass of Lochryan," which I do not admire. I have set down the air, therefore, as a creditor of yours. Many of the Jacobite songs are replete with wit and humour; might not the best of these be included in our volume of comic songs?

POSTSCRIPT, FROM THE HON. A. ERSKINE.* — Mr. Thomson has been so obliging as to give me a perusal of your songs. "Highland Mary" is most enchantingly pathetic, and "Duncan Gray" possesses native genuine humour: "Spak o' lowpin' o'er a hin," is a line of itself that should make you immortal. I sometimes hear of you from our mutual friend Cunningham, who is a most excellent fellow, and possesses, above all men I know, the charm of a most obliging disposition. You kindly promised me, about a year ago, a collection of your unpublished productions, religious and amorous. I know from experience how irksome it is to copy. If you will get any trusty

person in Dumfries to write them over fair, I will give Peter Hill whatever money he asks for his trouble, and I certainly shall not betray your confidence. I am, your hearty admirer,

ANDREW ERSKINE.



No. XII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

26th Jan., 1793.

I APPROVE greatly, my dear Sir, of your plans. Dr. Beattie's essay will of itself be a treasure. On my part, I mean to draw up an appendix to the Doctor's essay, containing my stock of anecdotes, &c., of our Scots songs. All the late Mr. Tytler's anecdotes I have by me, taken down in the course of my acquaintance with him from his own mouth. I am such an enthusiast that, in the course of my several peregrinations through Scotland, I made a pilgrimage to the individual spot from which every song took its rise; "Lochaber" and the "Braes of Ballenden" excepted. So far as the locality, either from the title of the air or the tenor of the song, could be ascertained, I have paid my devotions at the particular shrine of every Scots muse.

I do not doubt but you might make a very valuable collection of Jacobite songs; but would it give no offence? In the meantime, do not you think that some of them, particularly "The Sow's Tail to Geordie," as an air, with other words, might be well worth a place in your collection of lively songs?

If it were possible to procure songs of merit, it would be proper to have one set of Scots words to every air, and that the set of words to which the notes ought to be set. There is a *naïveté*, a pastoral simplicity, in a slight intermixture of Scots words and phraseology, which is more in unison (at least to my taste, and, I will add, to every genuine Caledonian taste) with the simple pathos or rustic sprightliness of our native music, than any English verses whatever.

The very name of Peter Pindar is an acquisition to your work. His "Gregory" is beautiful. I have tried to give you a set of stanzas in Scots on the same subject, which are at your service. Not that I intend to enter the lists with Peter; that would be presumption indeed. My song, though much inferior in poetic merit, has, I think, more of the ballad simplicity in it.

* The Hon. Andrew Erskine was a younger brother of "the musical Earl of Kellie." He was originally in the army, but his tastes and habits were of a literary character. He was one of the contributors to 'Donaldson's Collection of Original Poems by Scottish Gentlemen,' and the author in part of a curious and rare volume, entitled 'Letters between the Hon. Andrew Erskine and James Boswell, Esq.' Edinburgh, 1763. These letters are partly in prose, and partly in verse."



LORD GREGORY.*

Slow

Tune—"Lord Gregory."

O mirk, mirk is this mid-night hour, And loud the tem-pest's roar;

A wae-fu' wan-d'rer seeks thy tow'r, Lord Gre-gory, ope thy door!

An ex-ile frae her fa-ther's ha', An' a' for lov-ing thee;

At least some pi-ty on me shaw, If love it may na be.

* To enable the reader to compare the "Lord Gregory" of Burns with that of Peter Pindar, we subjoin Dr. Wolcott's stanzas:—

Ah ope, Lord Gregory, thy door!
A midnight wanderer sighs;

Lord Gregory, mind'st thou not the grove,
By bonnie Irwine side,
Where first I own'd that virgin-love
I lang, lang had denied?

Hard rush the rains, the tempests roar,
And lightnings cleave the skies.

Who comes with woe at this drear night—
A pilgrim of the gloom?
If she whose love did once delight,
My cot shall yield her room.

Alas! thou heard'st a pilgrim mourn,
That once was priz'd by thee:
Think of the ring by yonder burn
Thou gav'st to love and me.

But should'st thou not poor Marian know,
I'll turn my feet and part;
And think the storms that round me blow
Far kinder than thy heart.



How often didst thou pledge and vow
Thou wad for aye be mine :
And my fond heart, itsel' sae true,
It ne'er mistrusted thine.

Hard is thy heart, Lord Gregory,
And flinty is thy breast :
Thou dart of heav'n that flashest by,
O wilt thou give me rest !
Ye mustering thunders from above,
Your willing victim see !
But spare and pardon my false love,
His wrangs to heaven and me !

My most respectful compliments to the honourable gentleman who favoured me with a postscript in your last. He shall hear from me and receive his MSS. soon.

No. XIII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

20th March, 1793.

MARY MORISON.

SLOWLY TUNE—"The Miller."

O Ma - ry, at thy win - dow be, It is the wish'd, the try - sted hour !

Those smiles and glan - ces let me see, That make the miser's treasure poor :

How blithely wad I bide the stoure, A wea - ry slave frae sun to sun,

Could I the rich re - ward se - cure, The love - ly Ma - ry Mo - ri - son.

Yestreen when, to the trembling string,
The dance gae'd through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw;
Though this was fair, and that was braw,
And you the toast of a' the town,
I sigh'd, and said among them a',
"Ye are na Mary Morison."

O Mary, canst thou wreck his peace,
What for thy sake wad gladly die?
Or canst thou break that heart of his,
Whase only fault is loving thee?
If love for love thou wilt na gie,
At least be pity to me shown;
A thought ungentle canna be
The thought o' Mary Morison.

MY DEAR SIR,

The song prefixed is one of my juvenile works. I leave it in your hands. I do not think it very remarkable, either for its merits or demerits. It is impossible (at least I feel it so in my stunted powers) to be always original, entertaining, and witty.

What is become of the list, &c., of your songs? I shall be out of all temper with you by-and-by. I have always looked upon myself as the prince of indolent correspondents, and valued myself accordingly; and I will not, cannot, bear rivalry from you nor any body else.



No. XIV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.



March, 1793.

WANDERING WILLIE.

ANDANTE.

TUNE—"Here awa, there awa"

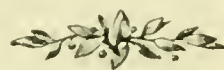
Here a - wa, there a - wa, wan - der - ing Wil - lie,
Now tired with wan - der - ing, haud a - wa hame!
Come to my bo - son, my ae on - ly dearie, And
tell me thou bringst me my Wil - lie the same.

Loud blew the cauld winter winds at our parting;
It was na the blast brought the tear in my ee;
Now welcome the simmer, and welcome my Willie,
The simmer to nature, my Willie to me.

Ye hurricanes, rest in the cave o' your slumbers!
O how your wild horrors a lover alarms;
Awaken, ye breezes, row gently ye billows,
And waft my dear laddie ance mair to my arms.

But if he's forgotten his faithfulest Nannie,
O still flow between us, thou wide roaring main;
May I never see it, may I never trow it,
But, dying, believe that my Willie's my ain!

I leave it to you, my dear Sir, to determine whether the above, or the old, "Thro' the lang muir,"* be the best.



No. XV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.



OPEN THE DOOR TO ME, OH!†

AFETTUCOSO.

TUNE—"Open the Door."

Oh, op - en the door, some pi - ty to show, Oh,
op - en the door to me, Oh!; Tho' thou hast been false, I'll
ev - er prove true, Oh, op - en the door to me, Oh!

* A song, preserved by Herd, seems to be referred to by Burns:—

Here awa, there awa, here awa, Willie,
Here awa, there awa, here awa hame;
Lang have I sought thee, dear have I bought thee,
Now I have gotten my Willie again.

Through the lang muir I have followed my Willie,
Through the lang muir I have followed him hame;
Whatever betide us, nought shall divide us,
Love now rewards all my sorrow and pain.

Here awa, there awa, here awa, Willie,
Here awa, there awa, here awa hame;
Come, love, believe me, nothing can grieve me,
Ilka thing pleases while Willie's at hame.

Burns afterwards altered the words of his own version, which will be found in a note to Letter No. XVII., together with the modern and popular melody of this beautiful song.

† With alterations.

‡ Original MS., "If love it may na be, Oh!"

Cauld is the blast upon my pale cheek,
 But cauldier thy love for me, Oh!
 The frost that freezes the life at my heart,
 Is nought to my pains frae thee, Oh!

The wan moon is setting behind the white wave,
 And time is setting with me, Oh!
 False friends, false love, farewell! for mair
 I'll ne'er trouble them, nor thee, Oh!

She has open'd the door, she has open'd it wide;
 She sees his pale corse on the plain, Oh!
 My true love! she cried, and sank down by his side,
 Never to rise again, Oh!

I do not know whether this song be really intended.



No. XVI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.



JESSIE.

Slow. TUNE—"Adieu Dundee."

True hearted was he, the sad swain o' the Yarrow, And fair are the
 maids on the banks o' the Ayr, But by the sweet side of the Nith's winding river,
 Are lovers as faithful, and maidens as fair; To equal young Jessie, seek
 Scotland all over; To equal young Jessie you seek it in vain; Grace, beauty, and
 elegance, fetter her lover, And maidenly modesty fixes the chain.

O, fresh is the rose in the gay, dewy morning,
 And sweet is the lily at evening close;
 But in the fair presence o' lovely young Jessie,
 Unseen is the lily, unheeded the rose.
 Love sits in her smile, a wizard ensnaring,
 Enthron'd in her ean he delivers his law:
 And still to her charms she alone is a stranger!—
 Her modest demeanour 's the jewel of a'.

No. XVII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 2nd April, 1793.

I WILL not recognize the title you give yourself, "the Prince of *indolent* correspondents;" but if the adjective were taken away, I think the title would then fit you exactly. It gives me pleasure to find you can furnish anecdotes with respect to most of the songs: these will be a literary curiosity.

I now send you my list of the songs, which I believe will be found nearly complete. I have put down the first lines of all the English songs which I propose giving in addition to the Scotch verses. If any others occur to you, better adapted to the character of the airs, pray mention them, when you favour me with your strictures upon everything else relating to the work.

Pleyel has lately sent me a number of the songs, with his symphonies and accompaniments added to them. I wish you were here, that I might serve up some of them to you with your own verses, by way of dessert after dinner. There is so much delightful fancy in the symphonies, and such a delicate simplicity in the accompaniments—they are, indeed, beyond all praise.

I am very much pleased with the several last productions of your muse: your "Lord Gregory," in my estimation, is more interesting than Peter's, beautiful as his is! Your "Here awa, Willie," must undergo some alterations to suit the air. Mr. Erskine and I have been conning it over; he will suggest what is necessary to make them a fit match.*

The gentleman I have mentioned, whose fine taste you are no stranger to, is so well-pleased both with the musical and poetical part of our work, that he has

* WANDERING WILLIE,

AS ALTERED BY MR. ERSKINE AND MR. THOMSON.

- "Here awa', there awa', wandering Willie,
 Here awa', there awa', haud awa' hame;
 Come to my bosom, my ain only dearie,
 Tell me thou bring'st me my Willie the same.
- "Winter winds blew loud and cauld at our parting,
 Fears for my Willie brought tears in my e'e,
 Welcome now simmer, and welcome my Willie,
 As simmer to nature, so Willie to me.
- "Rest, ye wild storms, in the cave o' your slumbers,
 How your dread howling a lover alarms!
 Blow soft, ye breezes! roll gently, ye billows!
 And waft my dear laddie ance mair to my arms.
- "But oh, if he 's faithless and minds na his Nannie,
 Flow still between us, thou dark-heaving main!
 May I never see it, may I never throw it,
 While dying I think that my Willie's my ain."

Our poet, with his usual judgment, adopted some of these alterations, and rejected others. The last edition is as follows:—

volunteered his assistance, and has already written four songs for it, which by his own desire I send for your perusal.



No. XVIII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

THE POOR AND HONEST SODGER.*

ANDANTE TUNE—"The Mill, Mill, O."

When wild war's dead-ly blast was blown, And gen-tle peace re-
turn-ing, Wi' mony a sweet babe fa-ther-leas, And
mony a wi-dow mourn-ing;† I left the lines and
tent-ed field, Where lang I'd been a lod-ger, My hum-
ble knap-sack a' my wealth, A poor and hon-est sod-ger.

A leal, light heart was in my breast,
My hand unstain'd wi' plunder;

ANDANTE TUNE—"Here awa, there awa."

Here a - wa, there a - wa, wan-der-ing Wil-lie,
Here a - wa, there a - wa, haud a - wa hame;
Come to my bo-som, my ain on-ly dear-ie,
Tell me thou bring'st me my Wil-lie the same.
Wint-er winds blew loud and could at our part-ing,
Fears for my Wil-lie brought tears to my e'e;
Wel-come now sim-mer, and wel-come my Wil-lie,
The sim-mer to na-ture, my Wil-lie to me.

And for fair Scotia, hame again,
I cheery on did wander.
I thought upon the banks o' Coil,
I thought upon my Nancy
I thought upon the witching smile
That caught my youthful fancy.

At length I reach'd the bonnie glen,
Where early life I sported;
I pass'd the mill, and trysting thorn,
Where Nancy aft I courted:
Wha spied I but my ain dear maid,
Down by her mother's dwelling!
And turn'd me round to hide the flood
That in my een was swelling.

Wi' alter'd voice, quoth I, Sweet lass,
Sweet as yon hawthorn's blossom,
O! happy, happy may he be,
That's dearest to thy bosom!
My purse is light, I've far to gang,
And fain would be thy lodger;
I've serv'd my king and country lang—
Take pity on a sodger.

"Rest, ye wild storms, in the cave of your slumbers,
How your dread howling a lover alarms!
Wauken, ye breezes, row gently, ye billows,
And waft my dear laddie ance mair to my arms.
"But oh, if he's faithless, and minds na his Nannie,
Flow still between us, thou wide-roaring main!
May I never see it, may I never throw it,
But, dying, believe that my Willie's my ain."

"Several of the alterations seem to be of little importance in themselves, and were adopted, it may be presumed, for the sake of suiting the words better to the music. The Homeric epithet for the sea, *dark-heaving*, suggested by Mr. Erskine, is in itself more beautiful, as well perhaps as more sublime, than *wide-roaring*, which he has retained, but as it is only applicable to a placid state of the sea, or at most to the swell left on its surface after the storm is over, it gives a picture of that element not so well adapted to the ideas of eternal separation which the fair mourner is supposed to imprecate. From the original song of "Here awa', Willie," Burns has borrowed nothing but the second line and part of the first. The superior excellence of this beautiful poem will, it is hoped, justify the different editions of it which we have given."—CURRIE.

"Burns, I have been informed," says a clergyman of Dumfriesshire, in a letter to Mr. George Thomson, "was one summer evening in an Inn at Brownhill, in Dumfriesshire, with a couple of friends, when a poor way-worn soldier passed the window; of a sudden it struck the Poet to call him in, and get the reel al of his adventures. After hearing which, he all at once fell into one of those fits of abstraction not unusual to him. He was lifted to the region where he had his garland and his singing robes about him, and the result was this admirable song."

† Variation:—

"And eyes again with pleasure beam'd,
That had been blear'd with mourning."

The alteration is the work of Mr. Thomson; it cannot be commended. "I cannot," says Burns, "alter the disputed lines in 'The Mill, Mill, O'; what you think a defect, I esteem a positive beauty."

Sae wistfully she gaz'd on me,
 And lovelier was than ever ;
 Quo' she, A sodger ance I lo'ed,
 Forget him shall I never :
 Our humble cot, and hamely fare,
 Ye freely shall partake it,
 That gallant badge—the dear cockade—
 Ye're welcome for the sake o't.

She gaz'd—she reddened like a rose ;
 Syne pale like ony lily,
 She sank within my arms, and cried,
 Art thou my ain dear Willie ?
 By him that made yon sun and sky,
 By whom true love 's regarded,
 I am the man ; and thus may still
 True lovers be rewarded !



The wars are o'er, and I 'm come hame,
 And find thee still true-hearted ;
 Though poor in gear, we're rich in love,
 And mair, we' se ne'er be parted.
 Quo' she, My grandsire left me gowd,
 A mailen plenish'd fairly :
 And come, my faithfu' sodger lad,
 Thou 'rt welcome to it dearly !

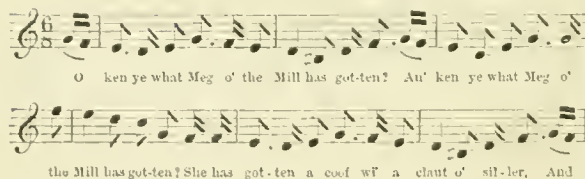
For gold the merehant ploughs the main,
 The farmer ploughs the manor ;
 But glory is the sodger's prize,
 The sodger's wealth is honour :
 The brave poor sodger ne'er despise,
 Nor count him as a stranger ;
 Remember he 's his country's stay,
 In day and hour of danger.



MEG O' THE MILL.*

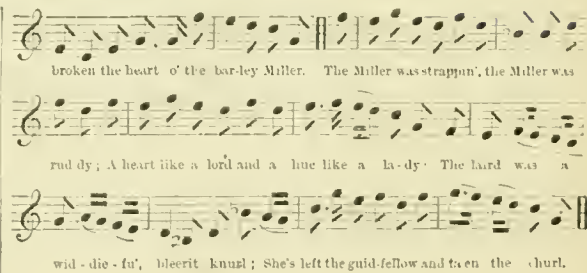
A LITTLE LIVELY.

TUNE—"Jackie Hume's Lament."



* The following is Burns' version of "Meg o' the Mill" supplied to Johnson's *Museum* :—

O ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten,
 An' ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten?
 A braw new naig wi' the tail o' a rottan,
 And that's what Meg o' the Mill has gotten.



O ken ye what Meg o' the Mill loes dearly,
 An' ken ye what Meg o' the Mill loes dearly?
 A dram o' gude strunt in a morning early,
 And that's what Meg o' the Mill loes dearly

The Miller he hecht her a heart leal and loving;
 The Laird did address her wi' matter mair moving,
 A fine pacing-horse wi' a clear chained bridle,
 A whip by her side, and a bonnie side-saddle.
 O wae on the siller, it is sae prevailin';
 And wae on the love that is fixed on a mailen!
 A tocher's nae word in a true lover's parle,
 But gi'e me my love, and a fig for the warl'!



No. XIX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

7th April, 1793.

THANK you, my dear Sir, for your packet. You cannot imagine how much this business of composing for your publication has added to my enjoyments. What with my early attachment to ballads, your book, &c., ballad-making is now as completely my hobby-horse as ever fortification was Uncle Toby's; so I'll e'en canter it away till I come to the limit of my race (God grant that I may take the right side of the winning-post!), and then cheerfully looking back on the honest folks with whom I have been happy, I shall say or sing, "Sae merry as we a' hae been!" and raising my last looks to the whole human race, the last words of the voice of "Coila" shall be, "Good night, and joy be wi' you a'!" So much for my last words; now for a few present remarks, as they have occurred at random on looking over your list.

The first lines of "The last time I came o'er the moor," and several other lines in it, are beautiful; but in my opinion—pardon me, revered shade of Ramsay!—the song is unworthy of the divine air. I shall try to make or mend. "For ever, fortune, wilt thou prove," is a charming song, but "Logan burn and Logan braes" are sweetly susceptible of rural imagery: I'll try that likewise, and if I succeed, the other song may class among the English ones. I remember the two last lines of a verse in some of the old songs of "Logan Water" (for I know a good many different ones) which I think pretty:—

"Now my dear lad maun face his faes,
 Far, far frae me and Logan braes."

"My Patie is a lover gay," is unequal. "His mind is never muddy," is a muddy expression indeed.

"O ken ye how Meg o' the Mill was married,
 An' ken ye how Meg o' the Mill was married?
 The priest he was oster'd, the clark he was carried,
 And that's how Meg o' the Mill was married.
 O ken ye how Meg o' the Mill was bedded,
 And ken ye how Meg o' the Mill was bedded?
 The groom gat sae fu', he fell awald beside it,
 And that's how Meg o' the Mill was bedded."

VOL. II.

"Then I'll resign and marry Patie,
 And syne my cockernony."

This is surely far unworthy of Ramsay, or your book. My song, "Rigs of Barley," to the same tune does not altogether please me; but if I can mend it, and thrash a few loose sentiments out of it, I will submit it to your consideration. "The Lass o' Patie's Mill" is one of Ramsay's best songs; but there is one loose sentiment in it, which my much-valued friend Mr. Erskine will take into his critical consideration. In Sir J. Sinclair's statistical volumes are two claims, one, I think, from Aberdeenshire, and the other from Ayrshire, for the honour of this song. The following anecdote, which I had from the present Sir William Cunningham of Robertland, who had it of the late John, Earl of Loudon, I can, on such authorities, believe:—

Allan Ramsay was residing at London Castle with the then earl, father to Earl John; and one forenoon riding, or walking out together, his Lordship and Allan passed a sweet romantic spot on Irvine Water, still called "Patie's Mill," where a bonnie lass was "tedding hay, hare-headed on the green." My Lord observed to Allan that it would be a fine theme for a song. Ramsay took the hint, and lingering behind, he composed the first sketch of it, which he produced at dinner.

"One day I heard Mary say" is a fine song; but for consistency's sake, alter the name "Adonis." Was there ever such banns published as a purpose of marriage between Adonis and Mary? I agree with you that my song, "There's nought but care on every hand," is much superior to "Poortith Cauld." The original song "The Mill, Mill, O," though excellent, is, on account of delicacy, inadmissible; still I like the title, and think a Scottish song would suit the notes best; and let your chosen song, which is very pretty, follow as an English set. "The banks of the Dee" is, you know, literally "Largolet" to slow time. The song is well enough, but has some false imagery in it: for instance,

"And sweetly the nightingale sung from the tree."

In the first place, the nightingale sings in a low bush, but never from a tree; and in the second place, there never was a nightingale seen, or heard, on the banks of the Dee, or any other river in Scotland. Exotic rural imagery is always comparatively flat. If I could hit on another stanza, equal to "The small birds rejoice," &c., I do myself honestly avow that I think it a superior song.* "John Anderson, my jo"—the song to this tune in Johnson's Museum is my composition, and I think it not my worst; if it suit you, take it and welcome. Your collection of

* "It will be found, in the course of this Correspondence, that the bard produced a second stanza of "The Chevalier's Lament" (to which he here alludes) worthy of the first."—CURRIE.

sentimental and pathetic songs is, in my opinion, very complete; but not so your comic ones. Where are "Tullochgorum," "Lumps o' puddin'," "Tibbie Fowler," and several others, which, in my humble judgment, are well worthy of preservation? There is also one sentimental song of mine in the Museum, which never was known out of the immediate neighbourhood, until I got it taken down from a country girl's singing. It is called "Craigieburn Wood," and in the opinion of Mr. Clarke is one of the sweetest Scottish songs. He is quite an enthusiast about it: and I would take his taste in Scottish music against the taste of most connoisseurs.

You are quite right in inserting the last five in your list, though they are certainly Irish. "Shepherds, I have lost my love!" is to me a heavenly air—what would you think of a set of Scottish verses to it? I have made one to it a good while ago, which I think . . . but in its original state is not quite a lady's song. I inclose an altered, not amended copy for you, if you choose to set the tune to it, and let the Irish verses follow.*

Mr. Erskine's songs are all pretty, but his "Lone Vale" is divine.

Yours, &c.

Let me know just how you like these random hints.



No. XX.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, *April*, 1793.

I REJOICE to find, my dear Sir, that ballad-making continues to be your hobby-horse. Great pity 'twould be were it otherwise. I hope you will amble it away for many a year, and "witch the world with your horsemanship."

I know there are a good many lively songs of merit that I have not put down in the list sent you; but I have them all in my eye. "My Patie is a lover gay," though a little unequal, is a natural and very pleasing song, and I humbly think we ought not to displace or alter it, except the last stanza. . . . †

* "Mr. Thomson, it appears, did not approve of this song, even in its altered state. It does not appear in the Correspondence; but it is probably one to be found in his MSS. beginning—

"Yestreen I got a pint of wine,
A place where body saw na;
Yestreen lay on this breast of mine,
The gowden locks of Anna."

It is highly characteristic of our Bard but the train of sentiment does not correspond with the air to which he proposes it should be allied."—CURRIE.

† "The original letter from Mr. Thomson contains many observations on Scottish songs, and on the manner of adapting the words to the music, which, at his desire, are suppressed. The subsequent letter of Burns refers to several of these observations."—CURRIE.

No. XXI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

April, 1793.

I HAVE yours, my dear Sir, this moment. I shall answer it and your former letter, in my desultory way of saying whatever comes uppermost.

The business of many of our tunes wanting, at the beginning, what fiddlers call the starting-note, is often a rub to us poor rhymers.

"There 's braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,
That wander through the blooming heather,"

you may alter to

"Braw, braw lads on Yarrow braes,
Ye wander," &c.

My song, "Here awa', there awa'," as amended by Mr. Erskine, I entirely approve of, and return you. ‡

Give me leave to criticise your taste in the only thing in which it is, in my opinion, reprehensible. You know I ought to know something of my own trade. Of pathos, sentiment, and point you are a complete judge; but there is a quality more necessary than either in a song, and which is the very essence of a ballad, I mean simplicity: now, if I mistake not, this last feature you are a little apt to sacrifice to the foregoing.

Ramsay, as every other poet, has not been always equally happy in his pieces; still I cannot approve of taking such liberties with an author as Mr. W. proposes doing with "The last time I came o'er the moor." Let a poet, if he chooses, take up the idea of another, and work it into a piece of his own; but to mangle the works of the poor bard, whose tuneful tongue is now mute for ever in the dark and narrow house, by Heaven, 'twould be sacrilege! I grant that Mr. W.'s version is an improvement; but I know Mr. W. well and esteem him much; let him mend the song as the Highlander mended his gun: he gave it a new stock, a new lock, and a new barrel.

I do not, by this, object to leaving out improper stanzas, where that can be done without spoiling the whole. One stanza in "The Lass o' Patie's Mill" must be left out; the song will be nothing worse for it. I am not sure if we can take the same liberty with "Corn rigs are bonnie." Perhaps it might want the last stanza, and be the better for it. "Cauld kail in Aberdeen" you must leave with me yet a while. I have vowed to have a song to that air on the lady whom I attempted to celebrate in the verses, "Poortith cauld and restless love." At any rate, my other song, "Green grow the rushes," will never suit. That song is current in Scotland under the old title, and to the merry

‡ "The reader has already seen that Burns did not finally adopt all of Mr. Erskine's alterations."—CURRIE.

old tune of that name, which of course would mar the progress of your song to celebrity. Your book will be the standard of Scots songs for the future: let this idea ever keep your judgment on the alarm.

I send a song on a celebrated toast in this country, to suit "Bonnie Dundee." I send you also a ballad to the "Mill, Mill, O."*

"The last time I came o'er the moor," I would fain attempt to make a Scots song for, and let Ramsay's be the English set. You shall hear from me soon. When you go to London on this business, can you come by Dumfries? I have still several MS. Scots airs by me, which I have picked up mostly from the singing of country lasses. They please me vastly; but your learned lugs would perhaps be displeased with the very feature for which I like them. I call them simple; you would pronounce them silly. Do you know a fine air called "Jackie Hume's Lament?" I have a song of considerable merit to that air. I'll inclose you both the song and tune, as I had them ready to send to Johnson's Museum.† I send you likewise, to me, a beautiful little air, which I had taken down from *vieu voce*.‡ Adieu.



No. XXII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

MY DEAR SIR,

April, 1793.

I HAD scarcely put my last letter into the post-office when I took up the subject of "The last time I came o'er the moor," and ere I slept, drew the outlines of the foregoing. § How far I have succeeded, I leave on this, as on every other occasion, to you to decide. I own my vanity is flattered, when you give my songs a place in your elegant and superb work; but to be of service to the work is my first wish. As I have often told you, I do not in a single instance wish you, out of compliment to me, to insert any thing of mine. One hint let me give you—whatever Mr. Pleyel does, let him not alter one iota of the original Scottish airs; I mean in the song department; but let our national music preserve its native features.

* "The song to the tune of "Bonnie Dundee" is that in No. XVI. The ballad to the "Mill, Mill, O" is that beginning—

"When wild war's deadly blast was blawn."—CURRIE.

† The song alluded to is that given in No. XVIII., "O ken ye what Meg o' the Mill has gotten?"

‡ The air here mentioned is that for which he wrote the ballad of "Bonnie Jean." See No. XXVII.

§ This song will be found in a subsequent part.

They are, I own, frequently irreducible to the more modern rules; but on that very eccentricity, perhaps, depends a great part of their effect.



No. XXIII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 26th April, 1793.

I HEARTILY thank you, my dear Sir, for your last two letters, and the songs which accompanied them. I am always both instructed and entertained by your observations; and the frankness with which you speak out your mind is to me highly agreeable. It is very possible I may not have the true idea of simplicity in composition. I confess there are several songs, of Allan Ramsay's for example, that I think silly enough, which another person, more conversant than I have been with country people, would perhaps call simple and natural. But the lowest scenes of simple nature will not please generally, if copied precisely as they are. The poet, like the painter, must select what will form an agreeable as well as a natural picture. On this subject it were easy to enlarge; but, at present, suffice it to say that I consider simplicity, rightly understood, as a most essential quality in composition, and the ground-work of beauty in all the arts. I will gladly appropriate your most interesting new ballad, "When wild war's deadly blast," &c., to the "Mill, Mill, O," as well as the two other songs to their respective airs; but the third and fourth lines of the first verse must undergo some little alteration in order to suit the music. Pleyel does not alter a single note of the songs. That would be absurd indeed! With the airs which he introduces into the sonatas I allow him to take such liberties as he pleases; but that has nothing to do with the songs. . . .

P.S.—I wish you would do as you proposed with your "Rigs o' Barley." If the loose sentiments are thrashed out of it, I will find an air for it; but as to this there is no hurry.



No. XXIV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

June, 1793.

WHEN I tell you, my dear Sir, that a friend of mine, in whom I am much interested, has fallen a sacrifice to these

accursed times, you will easily allow that it might unhinge me for doing any good among ballads. My own loss, as to pecuniary matters, is trifling; but the total ruin of a much-loved friend is a loss indeed. Pardon my seeming inattention to your last commands.

I cannot alter the disputed lines in the "Mill, Mill, O." * What you think a defect, I esteem as a positive beauty: so you see how doctors differ. I shall now, with as much alacrity as I can muster, go on with your commands.

You know Frazer, the hautboy-player in Edinlaurgh—he is here, instructing a band of music for a fencible corps quartered in this county. Among many of his airs that please me, there is one well known, as a reel, by the name of "The Quaker's Wife;" and which I remember a grand-aunt of mine used to sing, by the name of "Liggeram Cosh, my bonnie wee lass." Mr. Frazer plays it slow, and with an expression that quite charms me. I became such an enthusiast about it that I made a song for it, which I here subjoin, and inclose Frazer's set of the tune. If they hit your fancy, they are at your service; if not, return me the tune, and I will put it in Johnson's Museum. I think the song is not in my worst manner.

BLYTHE HAE I BEEN.†

ALLEGRETTO. TUNE—"The Quaker's Wife."

Blythe hae I been on you bill, As the lambs be-fore me;
Care-less il-ka thought and free, As the breeze flew o'er me;
Now nae lang-er sport and play, Mirth or sang can please me;
Les-ley is sae fair and coy, Care and an-guish seize me.

Heavy, heavy is the task,
Hopeless love declaring:
Trembling, I dow nought but glow'r,
Sighing, dumb, despairing!

* "The lines were the third and fourth—

"Wi' mony a sweet babe fatherless,
And mony a widow mourning."

"As our poet had maintained a long silence, and the first number of Mr. Thomson's Musical Work was in the press, this gentleman ventured, by Mr. Erskine's advice, to substitute for them in that publication—

"And eyes again with pleasure beam'd
That had been bleared with mourning."

Though better suited to the music, these lines are inferior to the original. This is the only alteration adopted by Mr. Thomson, which Burns did not approve, or at least assent to."—CURRIE.

† Miss Lesley Baillie is the subject of this song.

If she winna ease the thraws
In my bosom swelling;
Underneath the grass-green sod,
Soon maun be my dwelling.

I should wish to hear how this pleases you.



No. XXV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

25th June, 1793.

HAVE you ever, my dear Sir, felt your bosom ready to burst with indignation on reading of those mighty villains who divide kingdom against kingdom, desolate provinces, and lay nations waste, out of the wantonness of ambition, or often from still more ignoble passions? In a mood of this kind to-day, I recollected the air of "Logan Water;" and it occurred to me that its querulous melody probably had its origin from the plaintive indignation of some public destroyer; and overwhelmed with private distress, the consequence of a country's ruin. If I have done any thing at all like justice to my feelings, the following song, composed in three-quarters of an hour's meditation in my elbow chair, ought to have some merit:—

LOGAN BRAES.

ANDANTE. TUNE—"Logan Water."

O Lo-gan, sweetly didst thou glide, That day I was my Wil-lie's bride!
And years sin-syne hae o'er us run, Like Lo-gan to the ain-mer sun.
But now thy flow'ry banks ap-pear Like drummie winter, dark and drear,
While my dear lad maun face his foes, Far, far frae me and Lo-gan braes!

† Stenhouse says, "About the year 1783 a new song, to the tune of 'Logan Water,' written by Mr. John Mayne, a native of Glasgow, became very popular in the south-west of Scotland. It was published along with the old air, not long thereafter, by the music-sellers, and soon became a favourite at Vauxhall and other parts of the kingdom. It was afterwards printed in the *Star* Newspaper of London, signed with the initial letter of the author's surname, on 23rd May, 1783, as follows:—

"By Logan's streams that rin sae deep
Fu' aft wi' glee I've herded sheep;
Herded sheep or gather'd slaes,
Wi' my dear lad on Logan braes:

Again the merry month o' May
Has made our hills and valleys gay;
The birds rejoice in leafy bowers,
The bees hum round the breathing flowers:
Blithe morning lifts his rosy eye,
And evening's tears are tears of joy:
My soul, delightless, a' surveys,
While Willie's far frae Logan braes.

Within yon milk-white hawthorn bush,
Amang her nestlings sits the thrush;
Her faithfu' mate will share her toil,
Or wi' his song her cares beguile:
But I, wi' my sweet nurslings here,
Nae mate to help, nae mate to cheer,
Pass widow'd nights, and joyless days,
While Willie's far frae Logan braes.

O wae upon you, men o' state,
That brethren rouse to deadly hate!
As ye make mony a fond heart mourn,
Sae may it on your heads return!
How can your flinty hearts enjoy
The widow's tears, the orphan's cry? *
But soon may peace bring happy days,
And Willie hame to Logan braes!

Do you know the following beautiful little fragment in Witherspoon's collection of Scots song?

O gin my love were yon red rose,
That grows upon the castle wa':

But; wae's my heart! thae days are gane,
And fu' o' grief I herd my lane;
While my dear lad maun face his faes,
Far, far frae me and Logan braes!

'Nae mair at Logan kirk will he,
Atween the preachings meet wi' me,
Meet wi' me, or, when it's mirk,
Convoy me hame frae Logan kirk.
I weel may sing—thae days are gane!
Frae kirk and fair I come alane,
While my dear lad maun face his faes,
Far, far frae me and Logan braes!'

* Burns imagined that this delightful composition of Mr. Mayne was of considerable antiquity. In a letter to a correspondent, dated 7th April, 1793, he says, 'I remember the two last lines of a verse in some of the old songs of Logan Water, which I think pretty.'

'Now my dear lad maun face his faes,
Far, far frae me and Logan braes.'

"These two lines Burns has incorporated into his elegant stanzas to the same tune, composed in one of his pensive moods."

* Original MS.

"Ye mind na, 'mid your cruel joys,
The widow's tears, the orphan's cries."

And I myself a drap o' dew,
Into her bonnie breast to fa'!

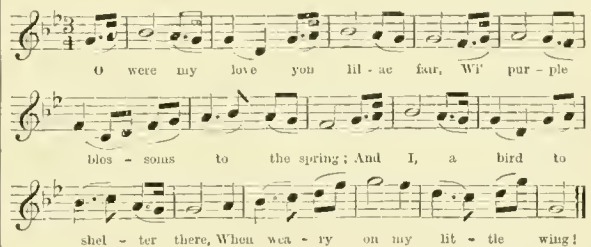
O, there beyond expression blest,
I'd feast on beauty a' the night;
Sea'd on her silk-saft faults to rest,
Till fle'y'd awa by Phœbus' light.

This thought is inexpressibly beautiful; and quite, so far as I know, original. It is too short for a song, else I would forswear you altogether unless you gave it a place. I have often tried to eke a stanza to it, but in vain. After balancing myself for a musing five minutes, on the hind-legs of my elbow-chair, I produced the following.

The verses are far inferior to the foregoing, I frankly confess; but if worthy of insertion at all, they might be first in place: as every poet, who knows any thing of his trade, will husband his best thoughts for a concluding stroke.

Slow.

TUNE—"Hughie Graham."



How I wad mourn, when it was torn
By autumn wild and winter rude!
But I wad sing on wanton wing,
When youthfu' May its bloom renew'd. †



No. XXVL *

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

MONDAY, 1st July, 1793.

I AM extremely sorry, my good Sir, that any thing should happen to unhinge you. The times are terribly out of tune; and when harmony will be restored, Heaven knows.

The first book of songs, just published, will be despatched to you along with this. Let me be favoured with your opinion of it frankly and freely.

† The fragment which Burns has here eked out will be found in Herd's collection.

O Jeanie fair, I lo'e thee dear;
 O canst thou think to fancy me?
 Or wilt thou leave thy mammie's cot,
 And learn to tent the farms wi' me?

At barn or byre thou shalt na drudge,
 Or naething else to trouble thee;*
 But stray among the heather-bells,
 And tent the waving corn wi' me.
 Now what could artless Jeanie do?
 She had nae will to say him na:
 At length she blush'd a sweet consent,
 And love was aye between them twa.

I have some thoughts of inserting in your index, or in my notes, the names of the fair ones, the themes of my songs. I do not mean the name at full; but dashes or asterisks, so as ingenuity may find them out.

The heroine of the foregoing is Miss M., daughter to Mr. M. of D., one of your subscribers. I have not painted her in the rank which she holds in life, but in the dress and character of a cottager.



No. XXVIII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

July, 1793.

I ASSURE you, my dear Sir, that you truly hurt me with your pecuniary parcel. It degrades me in my own eyes. However, to return it would savour of affectation; but as to any more traffic of that debtor and creditor kind, I swear by that HONOUR which crowns the upright statue of ROBERT BURNS' INTEGRITY—on the least motion of it, I will indignantly spurn the by-past transaction, and from that moment commence entire stranger to you! BURNS' character for generosity of sentiment and independence of mind will, I trust, long outlive any of his wants which the cold unfeeling ore can supply; at least, I will take care that such a character he shall deserve.

Thank you for my copy of your publication. Never did my eyes behold, in any musical work, such elegance and correctness. Your preface, too, is admirably written; only your partiality to me has made you say too much: however, it will bind me down to double every effort in the future progress of the work. The following are a few remarks on the songs in the list you sent me. I never

copy what I write to you, so I may be often tautological, or perhaps contradictory.

"The Flowers of the Forest" is charming as a poem, and should be, and must be, set to the notes; but, though out of your rule, the three stanzas, beginning,

"I ha'e seen the smiling o' fortune beguiling,"

are worthy of a place, were it but to immortalize the author of them, who is an old lady of my acquaintance, and at this moment living in Edinburgh. She is a Mrs. Cockburn; I forget of what place; but from Roxburghshire.† What a charming apostrophe is

"O fickle fortune, why this cruel sport,
 Why, why torment us—poor sons of a day!"

The old ballad, "I wish I were where Helen lies," is silly to contemptibility.‡ My alteration of it in Johnson's

† A well-known Edinburgh beauty and poet, of Fairlee in Roxburghshire.

‡ "There is a copy of this ballad given in the account of the Parish of Kirkpatrick-Fleming (which contains the tomb of fair Helen Irvine), in the Statistics of Sir John Sinclair, vol. xiii. p. 275, to which this character is certainly not applicable."—CURRIE.

Stenhouse says, "Helen Irvine, a celebrated beauty of the sixteenth century, and daughter of the then Laird of Kirkconnel, in the county of Dumfries, was beloved by two gentlemen at the same time, who both resided in that neighbourhood. The name of the favourite suitor was Adam Fleming, that of the unsuccessful lover Bell of Blacket-house. The addresses of the latter, though seconded by the friends of the lady, being inflexibly rejected, he vowed to sacrifice Fleming to his resentment. Bent on this horrid design, he watched every opportunity of carrying it into execution; and one evening, while the happy pair were sitting on a romantic spot washed by the river Kirtle, the desperate lover suddenly appeared on the opposite bank with a loaded musket, which he levelled at the breast of his rival. Helen, aware of his atrocious aim, instantly threw herself before the body of her lover, and receiving the mortal wound which was intended for him, fell back and died in his arms. The murderer fled beyond seas, but was closely pursued from place to place by Fleming, who at length overtook him in the vicinity of Madrid. A furious combat ensued, which terminated in the death of the fugitive assassin. Fleming, on his return, went to visit the grave of his beloved Helen in the church-yard of Kirkconnel, and stretching himself upon it, he expired, breathing her name with his last sigh. His remains were interred by her side. The grave of the lovers is still pointed out, and on the tombstone the inscription *Hic jacet Adamus Fleming* is yet legible. A sword and a cross are sculptured on the stone, which the peasantry tell you represents the gun that shot Helen, and the sword that killed her murderer. A heap of stones is raised on the spot where the murder was committed, as a lasting monument of the abhorrence which fair Helen's contemporaries felt for the bloody deed.

There are various editions of this ballad in Pinkerton's Scottish Poems, Sir Walter Scott's Border Minstrelsy, Ritson's Scottish Songs, and other collections, but they all differ more or less from one another, and the several airs to which the words have been adapted are also dissimilar. All of them are evidently modern, and totally different from that to which the editor has always heard the ballad sung in the south of Scotland.

FAIR HELEN OF KIRKCONNEL.

"I wish I were where Helen lies,
 For night and day on me she cries;
 O that I were where Helen lies,
 On fair Kirkconnel lee!

* Original MS.

"Thy handsome foot thou shalt na set
 In barn or byre to trouble thee."

is not much better. Mr. Pinkerton, in his, what he calls, ancient ballads (many of them notorious, though beautiful enough, forgeries), has the best set. It is full of his own interpolations; but no matter.

In my next I will suggest to your consideration a few songs which may have escaped your hurried notice. In the mean time, allow me to congratulate you now, as a brother of the quill. You have *committed* your character and fame; which will now be tried, for ages to come, by

"O Helen! lovely, chaste, and fair,
A ringlet o' thy gowden hair
In my fond bosom I will wear,
Until the day I die.

"I curst the heart that form'd the thought,
I curst the hand that fir'd the shot,
When in these arms my Helen dropt,
And died to shelter me.

"Ye weel may think my heart was sair,
When down she sank and spak nae mair,
And I beheld my lovely fair
Stretch'd on Kirkeconnel lee.

"To foreign climes the traitor fled,
But quickly after him I sped;
Ere lang beneath my glaive he bled,
For her that died for me.

"I wish my grave were growing green,
Where Kirtle rows sue smooth and sheen
And close by Helen's might be seen
On fair Kirkeconnel lee.

"O Helen fair! O Helen chaste!
Were I wi' thee I wad be blest,
For thou liest lowly and at rest
On fair Kirkeconnel lee.

"Where Helen lies! Where Helen lies!
For night and day on me she cries!
I wish I were where Helen lies,
Who died for love of me.

Some of the peasantry allege that Helen was killed by an arrow in place of a bullet. In the following passage from a poem, written by Thomas Poyton, a pauper, after he had read Drummmond of Hawthornden's History of Scotland, printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July, 1783, this branch of the traditional story is evidently alluded to.

"Tother day as she work'd at her wheel,
She sang of fair Eleanor's fate,
Who fell by stern jealousy's steel,
As on Kirtle's smooth margin she sate.

"Her lover to shield from the dart,
Most eagerly she interpos'd;
The arrow transpierc'd her fond heart,
The fair in his arms her eyes clos'd.

"O Fleming, how wretched thy doom,
Thy love to see wounded to death;
No wonder that, stretch'd on her tomb,
In grief thou surrender'st thy breath.

"Yet one consolation was thine,
To soften fate's rigid decree,
Thy mistress her life did resign,
A martyr to love and to thee."

the illustrious jury of the SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF TASTE—all whom poesy can please, or music charm.

Being a bard of nature, I have some pretensions to second sight; and I am warranted by the spirit to foretell and affirm, that your great grandchild will hold up your volumes, and say with honest pride, "This so much admired selection was the work of my ancestor."



No. XXIX.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 1st August, 1793.

DEAR SIR,

I HAD the pleasure of receiving your last two letters, and am happy to find you are quite pleased with the appearance of the first book. When you come to hear the songs sung and accompanied, you will be charmed with them.

"The bonnie brucket Lassie" certainly deserves better verses, and I hope you will match her. "Cauld Kail in Aberdeen," "Let me in this ae night," and several of the livelier airs, wait the muse's leisure. These are peculiarly worthy of her choice gifts: besides, you'll notice, that in airs of this sort the singer can always do greater justice to the poet, than in the slower airs of "The bush aboon Traquair," "Lord Gregory," and the like; for in the manner the latter were frequently sung, you must be contented with the sound, without the sense. Indeed both the airs and words are disguised by the very slow, languid, psalm-singing style in which they are too often performed: they lose animation and expression altogether, and instead of speaking to the mind, or touching the heart, they cloy upon the ear, and set us a yawning!

Your ballad, "There was a lass and she was fair," is simple and beautiful, and shall undoubtedly grace my collection.



No. XXX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

MY DEAR THOMSON,

I HOLD the pen for your friend Clarke,* who at present is studying the music of the spheres at my elbow.

* Stephen Clarke, teacher and composer of music. He superintended the musical department of Johnson's *Museum*.



The Georgium Sidus he thinks is rather out of tune ; so until he rectify that matter, he cannot stoop to terrestrial affairs.

He sends you six of the Rondeau subjects, and if more are wanted, he says you shall have them. . . .

Confound your long stairs !

S CLARKE.



No. XXXI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

YOUR objection, my dear Sir, to the passages in my song of "Logan Water," is right in one instance ; but it is difficult to mend it : if I can I will. The other passage you object to does not appear in the same light to me.

I have tried my hand on "Robin Adair," and you will probably think, with little success ; but it is such a cursed, cramp, out-of-the-way measure, that I despair of doing any thing better to it.

VOL. II.

PHILLIS THE FAIR.*

ANDANTE MODERATO.

TUNE—"Robin Adair."

While larks with lit - tie wing Fanu'd the pure air, Tast - ing the breath - ing

spring, Forth I did fare ; Gay the sun's gold - en eye Peep'd o'er the

mountains high ; Such thy morn ! did I cry, Phill - lis the fair.

In each bird's careless song
Glad did I share,
While you wild flowers among ;
Chance led me there :
Sweet to the opening day,
Rosebuds bent the dewy spray ;
Such thy bloom ! did I say,
Phillis the fair.

* A tribute to Miss Phillis M'Murdo, written at the request of Mr. Stephen Clarke. She was a pupil of his, and he had a passion for her. She afterwards became Mrs. Lockhart of Carnwath, and died September 5, 1825.

Down in a shady walk,
 Doves cooing were;
 I marked the cruel hawk
 Caught in a snare;
 So kind may fortune be,
 Such make his destiny!
 He who would injure thee,
 Phillis the fair.

So much for nanby-pamby. I may, after all, try my hand on it in Scots verse. There I always find myself most at home.

I have just put the last hand to the song I meant for "Cauld kail in Aberdeen." If it suits you to insert it, I shall be pleased, as the heroine is a favourite of mine. If not, I shall also be pleased; because I wish, and will be glad, to see you act decidedly on the business. 'Tis a tribute to a man of taste, and as an editor, which you owe yourself.



No. XXXII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

August, 1792.

MY GOOD SIR,

I CONSIDER it one of the most agreeable circumstances attending this publication of mine, that it has procured me so many of your much-valued epistles. Pray make my acknowledgments to St. Stephen for the tunes; tell him I admit the justness of his complaint on my stair-case, conveyed in his laconic postscript to your *jeu d'esprit*, which I perused more than once, without discovering exactly whether your discussion was music, astronomy, or politics; though a sagacious friend, acquainted with the convivial habits of the poet and the musician, offered me a bet of two to one, you were just drowning care together; that an empty bowl was the only thing that would deeply affect you, and the only matter you could then study how to remedy!

I shall be glad to see you give "Robin Adair" a Scotch dress. Peter is furnishing him with an English suit for a change, and you are well matched together. Robin's air is excellent, though he certainly has an out-of-the-way measure as ever poor Parnassian wight was plagued with. I wish you would invoke the muse for a single elegant stanza to be substituted for the concluding objectionable verses of "Down the burn, Davie," so that this most exquisite song may no longer be excluded from good company.

Mr. Allan has made an inimitable drawing from your "John Anderson, my Jo," which I am to have engraved as

a frontispiece to the humorous class of songs; you will be quite charmed with it, I promise you. The old couple are seated by the fireside. Mrs. Anderson in great good humour is clapping John's shoulders, while he smiles and looks at her with such glee, as to show that he fully recollects the pleasant days and nights when they were "first acquaint." The drawing would do honour to the pencil of Teniers.*



No. XXXIII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

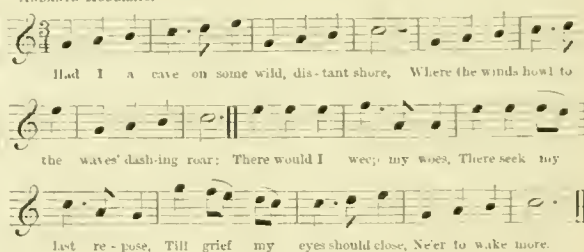
August, 1793.

THAT erinkum-erankum tune, "Robin Adair," has run so in my head, and I succeeded so ill in my last attempt, that I have ventured in this morning's walk one essay more. You, my dear Sir, will remember an unfortunate part of our worthy friend Cunningham's story, which happened about three years ago. That struck my fancy, and I endeavoured to do the idea justice as follows:—

HAD I A CAVE.

ANDANTE MODERATO.

TUNE—"Robin Adair."



Falsest of womankind,
 Canst thou declare
 All thy fond-plighted vows
 Fleeting as air?
 To thy new lover hie,
 Laugh o'er thy perjury,
 Then in thy bosom try
 What peace is there!

By the way, I have met with a musical Highlander in Breadallbane's Fencibles, which are quartered here, who

* Allan was born in 1744 in Alloa, and was for many years master and director of the academy established by the Board of Trustees at Edinburgh for manufactures and improvements. He illustrated "The Gentle Shepherd," and left a series of sketches designed for the poems of Burns. He died on the 6th August, 1796, just a fortnight after the poet.

assures me that he well remembers his mother singing Gaelic songs to both "Robin Adair" and "Gramachree." They certainly have more of the Scotch than Irish taste in them.

This man comes from the vicinity of Inverness: so it could not be any intercourse with Ireland that could bring them; except, what I shrewdly suspect to be the case, the wandering minstrels, harpers, and pipers used to go frequently errant through the wilds both of Scotland and Ireland, and so some favourite airs might be common to both. A case in point—they have lately in Ireland published an Irish air, as they say, called "Caun du delish." The fact is, in a publication of Corri's a great while ago you will find the same air, called a Highland one, with a Gaelic song set to it. Its name there, I think, is "Oran Gaoil," and a fine air it is. Do ask honest Allan, or the Rev. Gaelic parson,* about these matters.



No. XXXIV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

MY DEAR SIR,

August, 1793.

"LET me in this ae night" I will reconsider. I am glad that you are pleased with my song, "Had I a cave," &c., as I liked it myself.

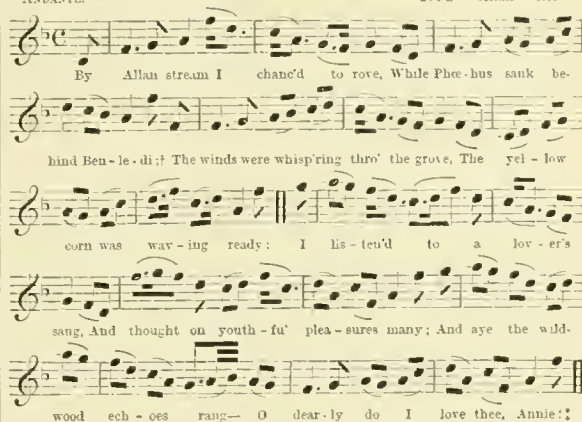
I walked out yesterday evening with a volume of the Museum in my hand, when, turning up "Allan Water," "What numbers shall the muse repeat," &c., as the words appeared, to me rather unworthy of so fine an air, and recollecting that it is on your list, I sat and raved under the shade of an old thorn, till I wrote one to suit the measure. I may be wrong; but I think it not in my worst style. You must know that in Ramsay's Teatable, where the modern song first appeared, the ancient name of the tune, Allan says, is "Allan Water," or "My love Annie's very bonnie." This last has certainly been a line of the original song: so I took up the idea, and, as you will see, have introduced the line in its place, which I presume it formerly occupied: though I likewise give you a choosing line, if it should not hit the cut of your fancy:—

* The Rev. Joseph Robertson Macgregor, the first minister of the first Gaelic chapel in Edinburgh, which was erected on the Castle-hill in 1769. He died in 1801.

BY ALLAN STREAM.

ANDANTE.

TUNE—"Allan Water."



O happy be the woodbine bower,
Nae nightly bogle make it eerie;
Nor ever sorrow stain the hour,
The place, and time I met my dearie!
Her head upon my throbbing breast,
She, sinking, said, "I 'm thine for ever!"
While mony a kiss the seal imprest,
The sacred vow we ne'er should sever.

The haunt o' spring 's the primrose brae,
The simmer joys the flocks to follow:
How cheery thro' her shortening day
Is autumn in her weeds o' yellow!
But can they melt the glowing heart,
Or chain the soul in speechless pleasure,
Or through each nerve the rapture dart,
Like meeting her, our bosom's treasure?

Bravo! say I: it is a good song. Should you think so too, not else, you can set the music to it, and let the other follow as English verses.

Autumn is my propitious season. I make more verses in it than all the year else.

God bless you!



No. XXXV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

August, 1793.

Is "Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad," one of your airs? I admire it much; and yesterday I set the follow-

† A mountain west of Strath-Allan, 3009 feet high.—R. B.

‡ Or, "O my love Annie's very bonnie."—R. B.

ing verses to it. Urbani, whom I have met with here, begged them of me, as he admires the air much; but as I understand that he looks with rather an evil eye on your work, I did not choose to comply. However, if the song does not suit your taste, I may possibly send it him. The set of the air which I had in my eye is in Johnson's Museum.

O WHISTLE AND I'LL COME TO YOU.*

WITH SPIRIT.

O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad, O whistle, and I'll
come to you, my lad; Tho' fa-ther and mo-ther and a should
gae mad, O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad! But
wa-ri-ly tent, when you come to court me, And come na un-less the back-yett be
a-je; Syne up the back-stile and let nae-bo-dy see, And come as ye
were na com-in' to me, And come as ye were na com-in' to me.

O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad,
O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad;
Tho' father and mither, and a' should gae mad,
O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad.

At kirk, or at market, when'er ye meet me,
Gang by me as though that ye ear'd na a flie;
But steal me a blink o' your bonnie black e'e,
Yet look as ye were na lookin' at me,
Yet look as ye were na lookin' at me.

O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad,
O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad;

* This air was a great favourite of Burns'. In 1787 he forwarded the two following stanzas to Johnson's Museum:—

“O whistle, an' I'll come to you, my lad,
O whistle, an' I'll come to you, my lad;
Though father and mither should baith gae mad,
O whistle, an' I'll come to you, my lad.
Come down the back stairs when ye come to court me;
Come down the back stairs when ye come to court me;
Come down the back stairs, and let naeboddy see;
And come as ye were na' coming to me.
And come as ye were na' coming to me.”

† MS. Variation:—

O whistle, and I'll come to thee, my jo,
O whistle, and I'll come to thee, my jo;
Tho' father and mother and a' should say no,
O whistle, and I'll come to thee, my jo.

Tho' father and mither, and a' should gae mad,
O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad.
Aye vow and protest that ye care na for me,
And whyles ye may lightly my beauty a wee;
But court na anither, though jokin' ye be,
For fear that she wyle your fancy frae me,
For fear that she wyle your fancy frae me.

Another favourite air of mine is, “The muckin' o' Geordie's byre.” When sung slow with expression, I have wished that it had had better poetry: that, I have endeavoured to supply as follows:—

ADOWN WINDING NITH.

ANDANTE.

TUNE—“The Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre.”

A-down winding Nith I did wander, To mark the sweet flowers as they spring;
A-down winding Nith I did wander, Of Phillis to muse and to sing.
CHORUS—Awa wi' your Belles and your Beauties, They never wi' her can compare,
Wha- ever has met wi' my Phillis, Has met wi' the queen o' the Fair.

The daisy amus'd my fond fancy,
So artless, so simple, so wild;
Thou emblem, said I, o' my Phillis!
For she is Simplicity's child.
Awa wi' your belles, &c.

The rose-bud's the blush o' my charmer,
Her sweet balmy lip when 'tis prest:
How fair and how pure is the lily!
But fairer and purer her breast.
Awa wi' your Belles, &c.

Yon knot of gay flowers in the arbour,
They ne'er wi' my Phillis can vie;
Her breath is the breath o' the woodbine,
Its dew-drop o' diamond her eye.
Awa wi' your Belles, &c.

Her voice is the song of the morning,
That wakes thro' the green spreading grove,
When Phœbus peeps over the mountains,
On music, and pleasure, and love.
Awa wi' your Belles, &c.

But beauty how frail and how fleeting,
The bloom of a fine summer's day!
While worth in the mind o' my Phillis
Will flourish without a decay.
Awa wi' your Belles, &c.

Mr. Clarke begs you to give Miss Phillis a corner in your book, as she is a particular flame of his. She is a Miss P. M.* sister to "Bonnie Jean." They are both pupils of his. You shall hear from me, the very first grist I get from my rhyming-mill.



No. XXXVI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

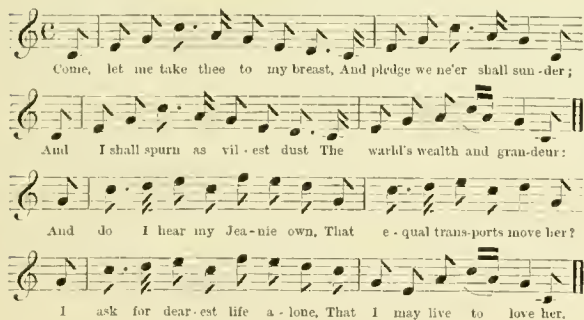
August, 1793.

THAT tune, "Cauld Kail," is such a favourite of yours, that I once more roved out yesterday for a gloamin'-shot at the muses;† when the muse that presides o'er the shores of Nith, or rather my old inspiring dearest nymph, Coila, whispered me the following. I have two reasons for thinking that it was my early, sweet, simple inspirer that was by my elbow, "smooth gliding without step," and pouring the song on my glowing fancy. In the first place, since I left Coila's native haunts, not a fragment of a poet has arisen to cheer her solitary musings, by catching inspiration from her; so I more than suspect that she has followed me hither, or at least makes me occasional visits; secondly, the last stanza of this song I send you is the very words that Coila taught me many years ago, and which I set to an old Scots reel in Johnson's Museum.

COME, LET ME TAKE THEE.

MODERATE.

TUNE—"Cauld Kail in Aberdeen."



* Phillis M'Murdo. See before. The original MS. contained the following additional stanza, which for some reason was deleted:—

"The primrose is o'er for the season,
But mark where the violet is blown;
How modest it peeps from the covert,
So Modesty sure is her own!"

† "'Gloamin'—twilight, probably from glooming. A beautiful poetic word, which ought to be adopted in England. A gloamin'-shot, a twilight interview."—CURRIE.

Thus in my arms, wi' a' thy charms,
I clasp my countless treasure;
I'll seek nae mair o' heaven to share,
Than sic a moment's pleasure:
And by thy een, sae bonnie blue,
I swear I 'm thine for ever!
And on thy lips I seal my vow,
And break it shall I never!

If you think the above will suit your idea of your favourite air, I shall be highly pleased. "The last time I came o'er the moor" I cannot meddle with, as to mending it; and the musical world have been so long accustomed to Ramsay's words, that a different song, though positively superior, would not be so well received. I am not fond of choruses to songs, so I have not made one for the foregoing.



No. XXXVII.

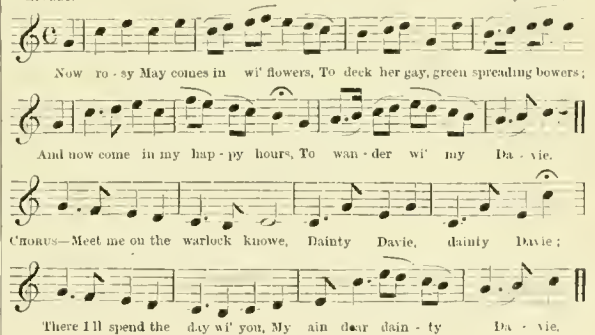
BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

DAINTY DAVIE.

August, 1793.

LIVELY.

TUNE—"Dainty Davie."



The crystal waters round us fa',
The merry birds are lovers a',
The scented breezes round us blaw,
A wandering wi' my Davie.
Meet me on the warlock knowe, &c.

When purple morning starts the hare,
To steal upon her early fare,
Then thro' the dews I will repair,
To meet my faithfu' Davie.
Meet me on the warlock knowe, &c.

When day, expiring in the west,
The curtain draws o' nature's rest,

I flee to his arms I lo'e best,
And that's my ain dear Davie.
Meet me on the warlock knowe, &c.

So much for Davie. The chorus, you know, is to the low part of the tune. See Clarke's set of it in the Museum.

N.B.—In the Museum they have drawled out the tune to twelve lines of poetry, which is d—d nonsense. Four lines of song, and four of chorus, is the way.



No. XXXVIII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 1st Sept., 1793.

MY DEAR SIR,

SINCE writing you last, I have received half a dozen songs, with which I am delighted beyond expression. The humour and fancy of "Whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad," will render it as great a favourite as "Duncan Gray." "Come, let me take thee to my breast," "Adown winding Nith," and "By Allan stream," &c., are full of imagination and feeling, and sweetly suit the airs for which they are intended. "Had I a cave on some wild distant shore," is a striking and affecting composition. Our friend, to whose story it refers, read it with a swelling heart, I assure you. The union we are now forming, I think, can never be broken; these songs of yours will descend with the music to the latest posterity, and will be fondly cherished so long as genius, taste, and sensibility exist in our island.

While the muse seems so propitious, I think it right to inclose a list of all the favours I have to ask of her—no fewer than twenty and three! I have burdened the pleasant Peter with as many as it is probable he will attend to: most of the remaining airs would puzzle the English poet not a little; they are of that peculiar measure and rhythm, that they must be familiar to him who writes for them.



No. XXXIX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

You may readily trust, my dear Sir, that any exertion in my power is heartily at your service. But one

thing I must hint to you, the very name of Peter Pindar is of great service to your publication; so get a verse from him now and then, though I have no objection, as well as I can, to bear the burden of the business.

You know that my pretensions to musical taste are merely a few of nature's instincts, untaught and untutored by art. For this reason, many musical compositions, particularly where much of the merit lies in counterpoint, however they may transport and ravish the ears of you connoisseurs, affect my simple lug no otherwise than merely as melodious din. On the other hand, by way of amends, I am delighted with many little melodies which the learned musician despises as silly and insipid. I do not know whether the old air, "Hey, tutti taitie," may rank among this number; but well I know that, with Frazer's hautboy, it has often filled my eyes with tears. There is a tradition, which I have met with in many places in Scotland, that it was Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn. This thought, in my yesternight's evening walk, warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence,* which I threw into a kind of Scottish ode, fitted to the air, that one might suppose to be the gallant ROYAL SCOT'S address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning.

BRUCE'S ADDRESS TO HIS ARMY AT BANNOCKBURN.

BOLELY. TUNE—"Hey Tutti Taitie"

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled, Scots, wham Bruce has af - ten led,
Welcome to your go - ry bed, Or to Vic - tor - ie!
Now's the day, and now's the hour; See the front o' battle hour;
See approach proud Edward's power; Chains and Slav - er - y!

Wha will be a traitor-knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave?
Wha sae base as be a slave!
Let him turn and flee!

Wha for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand, or freeman fa',
Let him on wi' me!

* See LIFE.



By Oppression's woes and pains !
 By your sons in servile chains !
 We will drain our dearest veins,
 But they shall be free !

Lay the proud usurpers low !
 Tyrants fall in every foe !
 Liberty 's in every blow !
 Let us do, or die !

So may God ever defend the cause of truth and liberty,
 as he did that day ! Amen.

P. S.—I showed the air to Urbani, who was highly pleased with it, and begged me to make soft verses for it ; but I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the subject, till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing ideas

of some other struggles of the same nature, not quite so ancient, roused my rhyming mania. Clarke's set of the tune, with his bass, you will find in the Museum ; though I am afraid that the air is not what will entitle it to a place in your elegant selection.



No. XL.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

I DARE say, my dear Sir, that you will begin to think my correspondence is persecution. No matter, I can't help it ;

a ballad is my hobby-horse; which, though otherwise a simple sort of harmless idiotical beast enough, has yet this blessed headstrong property, that when once it has fairly made off with a hapless wight, it gets so enamoured with the tinkle-gingle, tinkle-gingle of its own bells, that it is sure to run poor pilgarric, the bedlam-jockey, quite beyond any useful point or post in the common race of man.

The following song I have composed for "Oran-gaioil," the Highland air that, you tell me in your last, you have resolved to give a place to in your book. I have this moment finished the song, so you have it glowing from the mint. If it suit you, well!—if not, 'tis also well!

BEHOLD THE HOUR.*

ANDANTE. TUNE—"Oran-gaioil."



Be - hold the hour, the boat arrive; Thou guest, thou darling of my heart!

Se - ver'd from thee can I survive? But fate has will'd, and we must part.

I'll of - ten greet this surging swell, You dis-tant isle will of - ten hail; E'en

here I took the last farewell; There latest mark'd her van - ish'd sail.

Along the solitary shore,
While flitting sea-fowl round me cry,
Across the rolling, dashing roar,
I'll westward turn my wistful eye:
Happy, thou Indian grove, I'll say,
Where now my Nancy's path may be!
While thro' thy sweets she loves to stray,
O tell me, does she muse on me!



No. XLI.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 5th September, 1793.

I BELIEVE it is generally allowed that the greatest modesty is the sure attendant of the greatest merit. While you are sending me verses that even Shakspeare might be proud to own, you speak of them as if they were ordinary productions! Your heroic ode is to me the noblest composition of the kind in the Scottish language. I happened

* Clarinda is said to have been the inspirer of these verses. She was going to the West Indies.

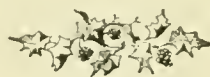
to dine yesterday with a party of your friends, to whom I read it. They were all charmed with it, entreated me to find out a suitable air for it, and reprobated the idea of giving it a tune so totally devoid of interest or grandeur: "Hey, tutti taitie." Assuredly your partiality for this tune must arise from the ideas associated in your mind by the tradition concerning it: for I never heard any person, and I have conversed again and again with the greatest enthusiasts for Scottish airs, I say, I never heard any one speak of it as worthy of notice.

I have been running over the whole hundred airs, of which I lately sent you the list; and I think "Lewie Gordon" is most happily adapted to your ode: at least with a very slight variation of the fourth line, which I shall presently submit to you. There is in "Lewie Gordon" more of the grand than the plaintive, particularly when it is sung with a degree of spirit, which your words would oblige the singer to give it. I would have no scruple about substituting your ode in the room of "Lewie Gordon," which has neither the interest, the grandeur, nor the poetry that characterize your verses. Now the variation I have to suggest upon the last line of each verse, the only line too short for the air, is as follows:—

- Verse 1st, Or to *glorious* victorie.
 " 2nd, *Chains*—chains and slavery.
 " 3rd, Let him, *let him* turn and flee.
 " 4th, Let him *bravely* follow me.
 " 5th, But *they shall*, they shall be free.
 " 6th, Let us, *let us* do, or die.

If you connect each line with its own verse, I do not think you will find that either the sentiment or the expression loses any of its energy. The only line which I dislike in the whole of the song is "Welcome to your gory bed." Would not another word be preferable to "welcome?" In your next I will expect to be informed whether you agree to what I have proposed. The little alterations I submit with the greatest deference.

The beauty of the verses you have made for "Oran-gaioil" will insure celebrity to the air.



No. XLII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

I HAVE received your list, my dear Sir, and here go my observations on it.†

† "Mr. Thomson's list of songs for his publication. In his remarks the bard proceeds in order, and goes through the whole; but on many of them he merely signifies his approbation. All his remarks of any importance are presented to the reader."—CURRIE.

"Down the burn, Davie." I have this moment tried an alteration, leaving out the last half of the third stanza, and the first half of the last stanza, thus:—

As down the burn they took their way,
And thro' the flowery dale;
His cheeks to hers he aft did lay,
And love was aye the tale.

With "Mary, when shall we return,
Sie pleasure to renew?"
Quoth Mary, "Love, I like the burn,
And aye shall follow you."*

"Thro' the wood, laddie"—I am decidedly of opinion that both in this and "There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame," the second or high part of the tune being a repetition of the first part an octave higher, is only for instrumental music, and would be much better omitted in singing.

"Cowden-knowes." Remember in your index that the song in pure English to this tune, beginning,

"When summer comes, the swains on Tweed,"

is the production of Crawford. Robert was his Christian name.

"Laddie, lie near me," must lie by me for some time. I do not know the air; and until I am complete master of a tune, in my own singing (such as it is), I can never compose for it. My way is: I consider the poetic sentiment correspondent to my idea of the musical expression; then choose my theme; begin one stanza; when that is composed, which is generally the most difficult part of the business, I walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature around me that are in unison and harmony with the cogitations of my fancy and workings of my bosom—humming every now and then the air with the verses I have framed. When I feel my muse beginning to jade, I retire to the solitary fire-side of my study, and there commit my effusions to paper; swinging at intervals on the hind legs of my elbow-chair, by way of calling forth my own critical strictures, as my pen goes on. Seriously, this, at home, is almost invariably my way.

What cursed egotism!

"Gil Morice" I am for leaving out. It is a plaguy length; the air itself is never sung; and its place can well be supplied by one or two songs for fine airs that are not in your list. For instance, "Cragieburn Wood," and

* "This alteration Mr. Thomson has adopted (or at least intended to adopt), instead of the last stanza of the original song, which is objectionable in point of delicacy."—CURRIE.

"Roy's Wife." The first, beside its intrinsic merit, has novelty; and the last has high merit as well as great celebrity. I have the original words of a song for the last air, in the hand-writing of the lady who composed it; and they are superior to any edition of the song which the public has yet seen.†

"Highland-laddie." The old set will please a mere Scotch ear best; and the new an Italianized one. There is a third, and what Oswald calls the old "Highland-laddie," which pleases me more than either of them. It is sometimes called "Ginglin Johnnie;" it being the air of an old humorous tawdry song of that name. You will find it in the Museum, "I ha'e been at Crookieden," &c. I would advise you, in this musical quandary, to offer up your prayers to the muses for inspiring direction; and in the mean time, waiting for this direction, bestow a libation to Bacchus; and there is not a doubt but you will hit on a judicious choice. *Probatum est.*

"Anld Sir Simon" I must beg you to leave out, and put in its place "The Quaker's Wife."

"Blythe ha'e I been o'er the hill" [see p. 44], is one of the finest songs ever I made in my life, and, besides, is composed on a young lady, positively the most beautiful, lovely woman in the world. As I purpose giving you the names and designations of all my heroines, to appear in some future edition of your work, perhaps half a century hence, you must certainly include "The bonniest lass in a' the world" in your collection.

"Dainty Davie," I have heard sung nineteen thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine times, and always with the chorus to the low part of the tune; and nothing has surprised me so much as your opinion on this subject. If it will not suit as I proposed, we will lay two of the stanzas together, and then make the chorus follow.

"Fee him, Father"—I inclose you Frazer's set of this tune when he plays it slow; in fact, he makes it the language of despair.‡ I shall here give you two stanzas in that style; merely to try if it will be any improvement. Were it possible, in singing, to give it half the pathos which Frazer gives it in playing, it would make an admirably pathetic song. I do not give these verses for any merit they have. I composed them at the time in which "Patie Allan's mither died, that was, about the back o' midnight;" and by the lee-side of a bowl of punch, which had overset every mortal in company, except the hantbois and the muse.

† This song is given in No. LXVI.

‡ "I had the pleasure of hearing Mr. Frazer play 'Fee him, Father,' in the exquisite style above described, at his benefit in the Theatre-royal, Edinburgh, 1822. After having for many years occupied the station of hantbois player at the orchestra of that place of amusement, he died in 1825, with the character of having been the very best performer, on this difficult but beautiful instrument, of his time in Scotland."—ROBERT CHAMBERS.

THOU HAST LEFT ME EVER.

MODERATO. TUNE "Fee him, Father."

Thou hast left me ev - er, Jam - ie! Thou hast left me ev - er; Thou
hast left me ev - er, Jam - ie! Thou hast left me ev - er. At - ten last
thou vow'd that death On - ly should us sev - er; Now thou'st left thy lass for aye,
I maun see thee nev - er, Jam - ie, I'll see thee nev - er.*

Thou hast me forsaken, Jamie!
Thou hast me forsaken;
Thou hast me forsaken, Jamie!
Thou hast me forsaken.
Thou canst love anither jo,
While my heart is breaking:
Soon my weary een I'll close—
Never mair to waken, Jamie,
Never mair to waken.

"Joekie and Jenny" I would discard, and in its place would put "There's nae luck about the house," which has a very pleasant air, and which is positively the finest love-ballad in that style in the Scottish, or perhaps in any other language. "When she came ben she bobbet," as an air, is more beautiful than either, and in the *andante* way would unite with a charming sentimental ballad.

"Saw ye my Father?" is one of my greatest favourites. The evening before last I wandered out, and began a tender song, in what I think is its native style. I must premise that the old way, and the way to give most effect, is to have no starting note, as the fiddlers call it, but to burst at once into the pathos. Every country girl sings—"Saw ye my father?" &c.

My song is but just begun; and I should like, before I proceed, to know your opinion of it. I have sprinkled it

* Mr. Thomson did not give the melody that Burns wished, but substituted the air of "My boy Tammy," altering the words to suit. The following is the song as altered by him:—

Thou hast left me ever, Tam, thou hast left me ever;
Thou hast left me ever, Tam, thou hast left me ever,
Often hast thou vow'd that death
Only should us sever:
Now thou'st left thy lass for aye—I must see thee never!

Thou hast me forsaken, Tam, thou hast me forsaken,
Thou hast me forsaken, Tam, thou hast me forsaken;
Thou canst love another maid,
While my heart is breaking!
Soon my weary eyes will close, never more to waken!

with the Scottish dialect, but it may be easily turned into correct English. †

"Todlin hame." Urbani mentioned an idea of his, which has long been mine, that this air is highly susceptible of pathos: accordingly, you will soon hear him at your concert try it to a song of mine in the Museum, "Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon." One song more and I have done: "Auld lang syne." The air is but mediocre; but the following song, the old song of the olden times, and which has never been in print, nor even in manuscript, until I took it down from an old man's singing, is enough to recommend any air.

AULD LANG SYNE.

SLOW. TUNE—"I Fee'd a Lad at Michaelmas."

Should auld acquaintance be forgot, And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be for - got, And days o' lang syne!
Chorus—For auld lang syne, my dear, For auld lang syne,
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet, For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stowp,
And surely I'll be mine;
And we'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet
For auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne, &c.

We twa ha'e run about the braes,
And pu'd the gowans fine;
But we've wander'd mony a weary foot,
Sin' auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne, &c.

We twa ha'e paid't i' the burn,
Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid ha'e roar'd,
Sin' auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne, &c.

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere,
And gie's a hand o' thine;
And we'll tak' a right guid-willie waught
For auld lang syne.
For auld lang syne, &c.

† This song appears afterwards. It begins,

"Where are the joys I ha'e met in the morning."

Now, I suppose I have tired your patience fairly. You must, after all is over, have a number of ballads, properly so called. "Gil Morice," "Tranent Muir," "M'Pherson's Farewell," "Battle of Sheriff Muir," or "We ran and they ran" (I know the author of this charming ballad, and his history), "Hardiknute," "Barbara Allan" (I can furnish a finer set of this tune than any that has yet appeared); and besides, do you know that I really have the old tune to which "The Cherry and the Slae" was sung, and which is mentioned as a well-known air in Scotland's Complaint, a book published before poor Mary's days? It was then called "The Banks o' Helicon:" an old poem which Pinkerton has brought to light. You will see all this in Tytler's history of Scottish music. The tune, to a learned ear, may have no great merit; but it is a great curiosity. I have a good many original things of this kind.



No. XLIII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

I AM happy, my dear Sir, that my ode pleases you so much. Your idea, "honour's bed," is, though a beautiful, a hackneyed idea; so, if you please, we will let the line stand as it is. I have altered the song as follows:—

BANNOCKBURN.*

ROBERT BRUCE'S ADDRESS TO HIS ARMY.

Scots, wha ha'e wi' Wallace bled;
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led;
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to glorious victorie!

Now 's the day, and now 's the hour;
See the front o' battle lower;
See approach proud Edward's power;
Edward! chains and slaverie!

Wha will be a traitor knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave?
Wha sae base as be a slave?
Traitor! coward! turn and flee!

* This well-known song was altered at Thomson's suggestion to suit the air "Lewie Gordon." Thomson afterwards saw that he had made a mistake, and reprinted it in his third volume as Burns originally wrote it wedded to the world-known melody, "Hey, tutti taitie."

Wha for Scotland's king and law
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
Freeman stand, or freeman fa',
Sodger! hero! on wi' me!

By oppression's woes and pains!
By your sons in servile chains!
We will drain our dearest veins,
But they shall be—shall be free!

Lay the proud usurpers low!
Tyrants fall in every blow!
Liberty's in every blow!
Forward! let us do, or die!

N. B.—I have borrowed the last stanza from the common stall edition of Wallace:—

"A false usurper sinks in every foe,
And liberty returns with every blow."

A couplet worthy of Homer. Yesterday you had enough of my correspondence. The post goes, and my head aches miserably. One comfort! I suffer so much just now in this world, for last night's joviality, that I shall escape scot-free for it in the world to come. Amen.



No. XLIV.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

12th September, 1793.

A THOUSAND thanks to you, my dear Sir, for your observations on the list of my songs. I am happy to find your ideas so much in unison with my own respecting the generality of the airs, as well as the verses. About some of them we differ, but there is no disputing about hobby-horses. I shall not fail to profit by the remarks you make, and to reconsider the whole with attention.

"Dainty Davie" must be sung two stanzas together and then the chorus: 'tis the proper way. I agree with you that there may be something of pathos, or tenderness at least, in the air of "Fee him, Father," when performed with feeling; but a tender cast may be given almost to any lively air, if you sing it very slowly, expressively, and with serious words. I am, however, clearly and invariably for retaining the cheerful tunes joined to their own humorous verses, wherever the verses are passable. But the sweet song for "Fee him, Father," which you began about the back of midnight, I will publish as an additional one. Mr. James Balfour, the king of good-fellows, and the best

singer of the lively Scottish ballads that ever existed, has charmed thousands of companies with "Fee him, Father," and with "Todlin' hame" also, to the old words, which never should be disunited from either of these airs. Some bacehanals I would wish to discard. "Fie, let's a' to the Bridal," for instance, is so coarse and vulgar, that I think it fit only to be sung in a company of drunken colliers: and "Saw ye my Father?" appears to me both indelicate and silly.

One word more with regard to your heroic ode. I think, with great deference to the poet, that a prudent general would avoid saying any thing to his soldiers which might tend to make death more frightful than it is. "Gory" presents a disagreeable image to the mind; and to tell them "Welcome to your gory bed," seems rather a discouraging address, notwithstanding the alternative which follows. I have shown the song to three friends of excellent taste, and each of them objected to this line, which emboldens me to use the freedom of bringing it again under your notice. I would suggest,

"Now prepare for honour's bed,
Or for glorious victorie."



No. XLV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793.

"Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" My ode pleases me so much that I cannot alter it. Your proposed alterations would, in my opinion, make it tame. I am exceedingly obliged to you for putting me on reconsidering it; as I think I have much improved it. Instead of "sodger! hero!" I will have it "Caledonian! on wi' me!"

I have scrutinized it over and over; and to the world, some way or other, it shall go as it is.* At the same

* "Mr. Thomson has very properly adopted this song (if it may be so called) as the bard presented it to him. He has attached it to the air of 'Lewie Gordon,' and perhaps among the existing airs he could not find a better; but the poetry is suited to a much higher strain of music, and may employ the genius of some Scottish Handel, if any such should in future arise. The reader will have observed, that Burns adopted the alterations proposed by his friend and correspondent, in former instances, with great readiness; perhaps, indeed, on all indifferent occasions. In this present instance, however, he rejected them, though repeatedly urged, with determined resolution. With every respect for the judgment of Mr. Thomson and his friends, we may be satisfied that he did so. He who in preparing for an engagement attempts to withdraw his imagination from images of death, will probably have but imperfect success, and is not fitted to stand in the ranks of battle where the liberties of a kingdom are at issue. Of such

time it will not in the least hurt me should you have it out altogether, and adhere to your first intention of adopting Logan's verses.

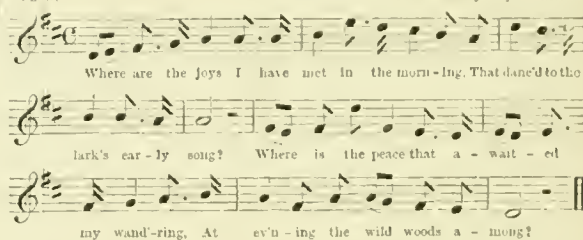
I have finished my song to "Saw ye my Father?" and in English, as you will see. That there is a syllable too much for the expression of the air, is true; but allow me to say, that the mere dividing of a dotted crotchet into a crotchet and a quaver is not a great matter: however, in that I have no pretensions to cope in judgment with you. Of the poetry I speak with confidence; but the music is a business where I hint my ideas with the utmost diffidence.

The old verses have merit, though unequal, and are popular: my advice is to set the air to the old words, and let mine follow as English verses. Here they are:—

FAIR JENNY.

SLOW.

TUNE—"Saw ye my Father."



No more a-winding the course of you river,
And marking sweet flowerets so fair:
No more I trace the light footsteps of pleasure,
But sorrow and sad-sighing care.

men the conquerors of Bannockburn were not composed. Bruce's troops were inured to war, and familiar with all its sufferings and dangers. On the eve of that memorable day their spirits were without doubt wound up to a pitch of enthusiasm suited to the occasion—a pitch of enthusiasm at which danger becomes attractive, and the most terrific forms of death are no longer terrible. Such a strain of sentiment this heroic 'welcome' may be supposed well calculated to elevate—to raise their hearts high above fear, and to nerve their arms to the utmost pitch of moral exertion. These observations might be illustrated and supported by a reference to the martial poetry of all nations, from the spirit-stirring strains of Tyrtæus to the war-song of General Wolfe. Mr. Thomson's observation, that 'Welcome to your gory bed is a discouraging address,' seems not sufficiently considered. Perhaps, indeed, it may be admitted that the term 'gory' is somewhat objectionable, not on account of its presenting a frightful, but a disagreeable image to the mind. But a great poet, uttering his conceptions on an interesting occasion, seeks always to present a picture that is vivid, and is uniformly disposed to sacrifice the delicacies of taste on the altar of the imagination. And it is the privilege of superior genius, by producing a new association, to elevate expressions that were originally low, and thus to triumph over the deficiencies of language. In how many instances might this be exemplified from the works of our immortal Shakespeare:—

"Who would *fardels* bear,
To groan and *sweat* under a weary life;
When he himself might his *quietus* make
With a bare *bodkin*?"

It were easy to enlarge, but to suggest such reflections is probably sufficient."—CURRIE.

Is it that summer's forsaken our valleys,
 And grim surly winter is near !
 No, no ! the bees, humming round the gay roses,
 Proclaim it the pride of the year.

Fain would I hide what I fear to discover,
 Yet long, long too well have I known,
 All that has causéd the wreck in my bosom,
 Is Jenny, fair Jenny alone.

Time cannot aid me, my griefs are immortal,
 Nor hope dare a comfort bestow ;
 Come then, enamour'd and foud of my anguish,
 Enjoyment I'll seek in my woe.

Adieu, my dear Sir ! The post goes, so I shall defer
 some other remarks until more leisure.



No. XLVI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1793

I HAVE been turning over some volumes of songs, to find
 verses whose measures would suit the airs for which you
 have allotted me to find English songs.

For "Muirland Willie" you have, in Ramsay's Tea-
 table, an excellent song, beginning, "Ah, why those tears
 in Nelly's eyes !" As for the "Collier's dochter," take the
 following old Bacebanal :—

DELUDED SWAIN, THE PLEASURE.

ALLEGROITTO.

TUNE—"The Collier's Bonnie Lassie"

De - lud - ed swain, the pleasurè The sick - le Fair can give thee,
 Is but a fai - ry treasure, Thy hopes will soon de - ceive thee :
 The bil - lows on the ocean, The breez - es id - ly roan - ing,
 The clouds un - cer - tain mo - tion, They are but types of Wo - man.

O ! art thou not ashamed
 To doat upon a feature ?
 If Man thou wouldst be named,
 Despise the silly creature.
 Go, find an honest fellow ;
 Good claret set before thee ;
 Hold on till thou art mellow,
 And then to bed in glory.

The faulty line in Logan-Water, I mend thus :

"How can your flinty hearts enjoy,
 The widow's tears, the orphan's cry ?"

The song otherwise will pass. As to "M'Gegroira Rua-
 Ruth," you will see a song of mine to it, with a set of the
 air superior to yours, in the "Museum," vol. ii. p. 181. The
 song begins :—

"Raving winds around her blowing."

Your Irish airs are pretty, but they are downright
 Irish. If they were like the "Banks of Banna," for
 instance, though really Irish, yet, in the Scottish taste,
 you might adopt them. Since you are so fond of Irish
 music, what say you to twenty-five of them in an additional
 number ! We could easily find this quantity of charming
 airs ; I will take care that you shall not want songs ; and
 I assure you that you would find it the most saleable of
 the whole. If you do not approve of "Roy's Wife," for
 the music's sake, we shall not insert it. "De'il tak' the
 wars" is a charming song : so is "Saw ye my Peggy ?"
 "There's nae luck about the house," well deserves a place.
 I cannot say that "O'er the hills and far awa'" strikes me
 as equal to your selection. "This is no my ain house" is
 a great favourite air of mine ; and if you will send me a
 set of it, I will task my muse to her highest effort. What
 is your opinion of "I ha'e laid a herrin' in saut ?" I like
 it much. Your Jacobite airs are pretty, and there are
 many others of the same kind pretty ; but you have not
 room for them. You cannot, I think, insert "Fie, let's a'
 to the bridal," to any other words than its own.

What pleases me as simple and *naïve*, disgusts you as
 ludicrous and low. For this reason, "Fie, gie me my
 coggie, Sirs," "Fie, let's a' to the bridal," with several
 others of that cast, are to me highly pleasing ; while "Saw
 ye my father, or saw ye my mother ?" delights me with
 its descriptive simple pathos. Thus my song, "Ken ye
 what Meg o' the mill has gotten ?" pleases myself so
 much, that I cannot try my hand at another song to the
 air ; so I shall not attempt it. I know you will laugh at
 all this ; but "ilka man wears his belt his ain gait."

No. XLVII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

October, 1793.

YOUR last letter, my dear Thomson, was indeed laden with heavy news. Alas, poor Erskine!* The recollection that he was a contributor in your publication has, till now, scared me from writing to you, or turning my thoughts on composing for you.

I am pleased that you are reconciled to the air of the "Quaker's wife;" though, by the bye, an old Highland gentleman, and a deep antiquarian, tells me it is a Gaelic air, and known by the name of "Leiger m' choss." The following verses I hope will please you, as an English song to the air:—

NANCY.†

ALLEGRO. TUNE—"The Quaker's Wife."

Thine an I, my falth-ful fair, Thine my love-ly Nan-cy;
Ev-ry pulse a-long my veins, Ev-ry rov-ing fan-cy.
To thy be-som lay my heart, There to throh and lan-guish;
Though des-pair had wrung its core, That would heal its an-guish.

Take away those rosy lips,
Rich with balmy treasure;
Turn away thine eyes of love,
Lest I die with pleasure.
What is life when wanting love?
Night without a morning:
Love's the cloudless summer sun,
Nature gay adorning.

Your objection to the English song I proposed for "John Anderson, my jo," is certainly just. The following is by an old acquaintance of mine, and I think has merit. The song was never in print, which I think is so much in your favour. The more original good poetry your Collection contains, it certainly has so much the more merit.

SONG.

BY GAVIN TURNBULL.

O condescend, dear charming maid,
My wretched state to view:

* "The Honourable A. Erskine, brother to Lord Kelly, whose melancholy death Mr. Thomson had communicated in an excellent letter, which he has suppressed."—CURRIE. He was found drowned in the Forth.

† Clarinda is said to be the subject of this song.

A tender swain to love betray'd,
And sad despair, by you.

While here all melancholy,
My passion I deplore,
Yet urg'd by stern resistless fate
I love thee more and more.

I heard of love, and with disdain
The urchin's power denied;
I laugh'd at every lover's pain,
And mock'd them when they sigh'd.

But how my state is alter'd!
Those happy days are o'er;
For all thy unrelenting hate,
I love thee more and more.

O yield, illustrious beauty, yield,
No longer let me mourn;
And though victorious in the field,
Thy captive do not scorn.

Let generous pity warn thee,
My wonted peace restore;
And, grateful, I shall bless thee still.
And love thee more and more.

The following address of Turnbull's to the Nightingale will suit as an English song to the air, "There was a lass and she was fair." By the bye, Turnbull has a great many songs in MS. which I could command, if you like his manner. Possibly, as he is an old friend of mine, I may be prejudiced in his favour: but I like some of his pieces very much.

THE NIGHTINGALE.

BY G. TURNBULL.

Thou sweetest minstrel of the grove,
That ever tried the plaintive strain,
Awake thy tender tale of love,
And soothe a poor forsaken swain.

For though the Muses deign to aid,
And teach him smoothly to complain,
Yet Delia, charming, cruel maid,
Is deaf to her forsaken swain.

All day, with fashion's gandy sons,
In sport she wanders o'er the plain;
Their tales approves, and still she shuns
The notes of her forsaken swain.

When evening shades obscure the sky,
And bring the solemn hours again,
Begin, sweet bird, thy melody,
And soothe a poor forsaken swain.

I shall just transcribe another of Turnbull's, which would go charmingly to "Lewie Gordon."

LAURA.

BY G. TURNBULL.

Let me wander where I will,
By shady wood or winding rill;
Where the sweetest May-born flowers
Paint the meadows, deck the bowers;
Where the linnet's early song
Echoes sweet the woods among;
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

If at rosy dawn I choose,
To indulge the smiling muse;
If I court some cool retreat,
To avoid the noon-tide heat,
If beneath the moon's pale ray,
Through unfrequented wilds I stray,
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

When at night the drowsy god
Waves his sleep-compelling rod,
And to fancy's wakeful eyes
Bids celestial visions rise;
While with boundless joy I rove
Through the fairy land of love;
Let me wander where I will,
Laura haunts my fancy still.

The rest of your letter I shall answer at some other opportunity.



No. XLVIII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

7th November, 1793.

MY GOOD SIR,

AFTER so long a silence, it gave me peculiar pleasure to recognize your well-known hand, for I had begun to be apprehensive that all was not well with you. I am happy to find, however, that your silence did not proceed from that cause, and that you have got among the ballads once more.

I have to thank you for your English song to "Leiger n' choss," which I think extremely good, although the colouring is warm. Your friend Mr. Turnbull's songs have doubtless considerable merit; and as you have the

command of his manuscripts, I hope you may find out some that will answer, as English songs, to the airs yet unprovided.



No. XLIX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

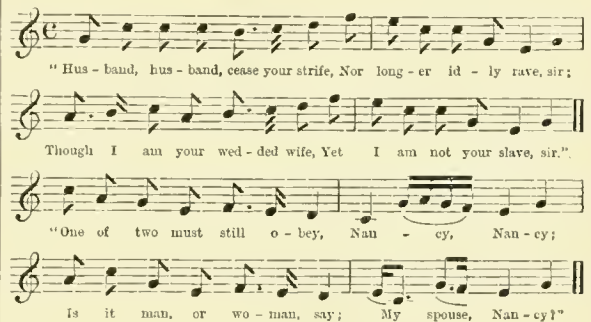
December, 1793.

TELL me how you like the following verses to the tune of "Jo Janet:"*

HUSBAND, HUSBAND, CEASE YOUR STRIFE.

LIVELY.

TUNE—"My Jo Janet."



"If 'tis still the lordly word,
Service and obedience;
I'll desert my sov'reign lord,
And so, good b'ye, allegiance!"
"Sad will I be, so bereft,
Nancy, Nancy,
Yet I'll try to make a shift,
My spouse, Nancy."

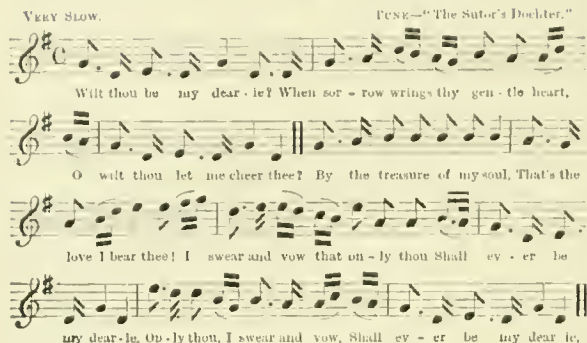
"My poor heart then break it must,
My last hour I'm near it:
When you lay me in the dust,
Think how you will bear it."
"I will hope and trust in heaven,
Nancy, Nancy;
Strength to bear it will be given,
My spouse, Nancy."

"Well, sir, from the silent dead,
Still I'll try to daunt you;
Ever round your midnight bed
Horrid sprites shall haunt you."

* "Jo Janet" is a humorous old Scottish song.

"I'll wed another, like my dear
Naney, Nancy;
Then all hell will fly for fear,
My spouse, Naney."

WILT THOU BE MY DEARIE.*



Lassie, say thou lo'es me;
Or if thou wilt na be my ain,
Say na thou 'lt refuse me:
If it winna, canna be,
Thou for thine may choose me,
Let me, lassie, quickly die,
Trusting that thou lo'es me.
Lassie, let me quickly die,
Trusting that thou lo'es me.



No. L

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 17th April, 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

OWING to the distress of our friend for the loss of his child, at the time of his receiving your admirable but melancholy letter, I had not an opportunity, till lately, of perusing it.† How sorry I am to find Burns saying, "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased?" while he is delighting others from the one end of the island to the other. Like the hypochondriac who went to consult a physician upon his case—"Go," says the doctor, "and see the famous Carlini, who keeps all Paris in good humour." "Alas! sir," replied the patient, "I am that unhappy Carlini!"

* Composed in honour of Miss Miller of Dalswinton, a young lady of great personal beauty. The above is adapted to the first strain of an old Strathspey.

† A Letter to Mr. Cunningham, included in the GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE.

Your plan for our meeting together pleases me greatly, and I trust that by some means or other it will soon take place; but your Bacchanalian challenge almost frightens me, for I am a miserable weak drinker!

Allan is much gratified by your good opinion of his talents. He has just begun a sketch from your "Cotter's Saturday Night," and if it pleases himself in the design, he will probably etch or engrave it. In subjects of the pastoral and humorous kind he is, perhaps, unrivalled by any artist living. He fails a little in giving beauty and grace to his females, and his colouring is sombre, otherwise his paintings and drawings would be in greater request.

I like the music of the "Sutor's Dochter," and will consider whether it shall be added to the last volume. Your verses to it are pretty; but your humorous English song, to suit "Jo Janet," is inimitable. What think you of the air, "Within a mile of Edinburgh?" It has always struck me as a modern English imitation, but it is said to be Oswald's, and is so much liked, that I believe I must include it. The verses are little better than nanby pamby. Do you consider it worth a stanza or two?



No. LI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

May, 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

I RETURN you the plates, with which I am highly pleased: I would humbly propose, instead of the younger knitting stockings, to put a stock and horn into his hands. A friend of mine, who is positively the ablest judge on the subject I have ever met with, and though an unknown, is yet a superior artist with the burin, is quite charmed with Allan's manner. I got him a peep of the "Gentle Shepherd;" and he pronounces Allan a most original artist of great excellence.

For my part, I look on Mr. Allan's choosing my favourite poem for his subject to be one of the highest compliments I have ever received.

I am quite vexed at Pleyel's being cooped up in France, as it will put an entire stop to our work. Now, and for six or seven months, I shall be quite in song, as you shall see by and by. I got an air, pretty enough, composed by Lady Elizabeth Heron of Heron, which she calls "The banks of Cree." Cree is a beautiful romantic stream; and as her Ladyship is a particular friend of mine, I have written the following song to it:—

HERE IS THE GLEN.*

ANDANTE.

TUNE—"The Flowers of Edinburgh."



It is Maria's voice I hear!

So calls the woodlark in the grove,

His little faithful mate to cheer;

At once 'tis music—and 'tis love.

And art thou come! and art thou true!

O welcome dear to love and me!

And let us all our vows renew,

Along the flowery banks of Cree.



No. LII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

July, 1794.

Is there no news yet of Pleyel? Or is your work to be at a dead stop, until the allies set our modern Orpheus at liberty from the savage thralldom of democratic discords? Alas the day! And woe is me! That auspicious period, pregnant with the happiness of millions.† . . .

I have presented a copy of your songs to the daughter of a much-valued and much-honoured friend of mine, Mr. Graham of Fintry. I wrote on the blank side of the title-page the following address to the young lady:—

Here, where the Scottish muse immortal lives,
In sacred strains and tuneful numbers join'd,
Accept the gift; tho' humble he who gives,
Rich is the tribute of the grateful mind.

* Instead of "The Banks of Cree" Thomson substituted the "Flowers of Edinburgh," which is given above.

† "A portion of this letter has been left out for reasons that will be easily imagined."—CURRIE.

So may no ruffian-feeling in thy breast,
Discordant, jar thy bosom-chords among;
But peace attune thy gentle soul to rest,
Or love ecstasie wake his seraph song,

Or pity's notes, in luxury of tears,
As modest want the tale of woe reveals;
While conscious virtue all the strain endears,
And heaven-born piety her sanction seals.



No. LIIL

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 10th August, 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

I OWE you an apology for having so long delayed to acknowledge the favour of your last. I fear it will be as you say, I shall have no more songs from Pleyel till France and we are friends. But nevertheless I am very desirous to be prepared with the poetry; and as the season approaches in which your muse of Coila visits you, I trust I shall, as formerly, be frequently gratified with the result of your amorous and tender interviews!



No. LIV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

30th August, 1794.

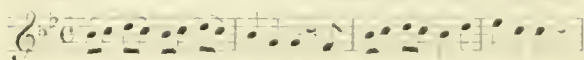
THE last evening, as I was straying out and thinking of "O'er the hills and far away," I spun the following stanza for it; but whether my spinning will deserve to be laid up in store, like the precious thread of the silk-worm, or brushed to the devil, like the vile manufacture of the spider, I leave, my dear Sir, to your usual candid criticism. I was pleased with several lines in it at first: but I own that now it appears rather a flimsy business.

This is just a hasty sketch, until I see whether it be worth a critique. We have many sailor songs; but as far as I at present recollect, they are mostly the effusions of the jovial sailor, not the wailings of his love-lorn mistress. I must here make one sweet exception—"Sweet Annie frae the sea-beach came." Now for the very song.

ON THE SEAS AND FAR AWAY.

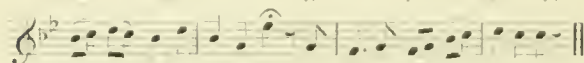
ALLEGRO-TO.

TUNE: "Over the Hills and Far Away."



How can my poor heart be glad, When absent from my sail or lad?

CHORUS—On the seas and far a-way, On stormy seas and far a-way;

How can I the thought fore-go? He's at sea to meet the foe?
Night-by dreams, and thoughts by day, Are aye with him that's far a-way.

Let me wander, let me rove, Still my heart is with my love!

CHORUS.
Night-by dreams, and thoughts by day, Are with him that's far a-way.

When in summer's noon I faint,
As weary flocks around me pant,
Haply in this scorching sun
My sailor's thund'ring at his gun:
Bullets, spare my only joy!
Bullets, spare my darling boy!
Fate, do with me what you may,
Spare but him that's far away!

On the seas and far away,
On stormy seas and far away;
Fate, do with me what you may,
Spare but him that's far away.

At the starless midnight hour,
When winter rules with boundless power;
As the storms the forest tear,
And thunders rend the howling air,
Listening to the doubling roar,
Surging on the rocky shore,
All I can—I weep and pray,
For his weal that's far away.

On the seas and far away,
On stormy seas and far away;
All I can—I weep and pray,
For his weal that's far away.

Peace, thy olive wand extend,
And bid wild war his ravage end,
Man with brother man to meet,
And as a brother kindly greet;
Then may heaven, with prosperous gales,
Fill my sailor's welcome sails,
To my arms their charge convey—
My dear lad that's far away.

On the seas and far away,
On stormy seas and far away;
To my arms their charge convey,
My dear lad that's far away.

I give you leave to abuse this song, but do it in the spirit of Christian meekness.

No. LV.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 16th September, 1794.

MY DEAR SIR,

You have anticipated my opinion of "On the seas and far away." I do not think it one of your very happy productions, though it certainly contains stanzas that are worthy of all acceptance.

The second is the least to my liking, particularly, "Bullets, spare my only joy." Confound the bullets! It might, perhaps, be objected to the third verse, "At the starless midnight hour," that it has too much grandeur of imagery, and that greater simplicity of thought would have better suited the character of a sailor's sweetheart. The tune, it must be remembered, is of the brisk, cheerful kind. Upon the whole, therefore, in my humble opinion, the song would be better adapted to the tune, if it consisted only of the first and last verses, with the choruses.



No. LVI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1794.

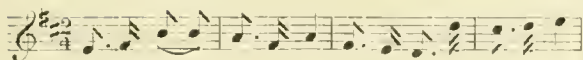
I SHALL withdraw my "On the seas and far away" altogether; it is unequal, and unworthy the work. Making a poem is like begetting a son: you cannot know whether you have a wise man or a fool, until you produce him to the world to try him.

For that reason I send you the offspring of my brain, abortions and all; and as such, pray look over them, and forgive them, and burn them. I am flattered at your adopting "Ca' the yowes to the knowes," as it was owing to me that it ever saw the light. About seven years ago I was well acquainted with a worthy little fellow of a clergyman, a Mr. Clunie, who sang it charmingly; and at my request Mr. Clarke took it down from his singing. When I gave it to Johnson, I added some stanzas to the song, and mended others, but still it will not do for you. In a solitary stroll which I took to-day, I tried my hand on a few pastoral lines, following up the idea of the chorons, which I would preserve. Here it is, with all its crudities and imperfections on its head.

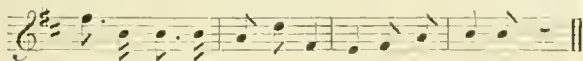


CA' THE YOWES.*

Slow.



CHORUS—Ca' the yowes to the knowes, Ca' them whare the heather grows,
 SONG—Hark, the mavis' even-ing sang, Sound-ing Clu-den's woods a-mang!



Ca' them whare the bur-nie rowes, My bon-nie dear-ie!
 Then a fauld-ing let us gang, My bou-nie dear-ie.

* Another version of this song will be found at page 11, vol. ii.
 The original tune, as given above, consists of one strain of eight bars.

We'll gae down by Cluden side,[†]
 Through the hazels spreading wide,
 O'er the waves that sweetly glide
 To the moon sae clearly.
 Ca' the yowes, &c.

Yonder Cluden's silent towers,
 Where at moonshine midnight hours,
 O'er the dewy bending flowers,
 Fairies dance sae cheery.
 Ca' the yowes, &c.

† Cluden, or Clouden, is a tributary to the Nith.

Ghaist nor bogle shalt thou fear;
 Thou 'rt to love and heaven sae dear,
 Nocht of ill may come thee near,
 My bonnie dearie,
 Ca' the yowes, &c.

Fair and lovely as thou art,
 Thou hast stown my very heart;
 I can die—but eanna part,
 My bonnie dearie!
 Ca' the yowes, &c.

I shall give you my opinion of your other newly adopted songs my first scribbling fit.



No. LVII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

September, 1794.

Do you know a blackguard Irish song called "Onagh's Water-Fall?" The air is charming, and I have often regretted the want of decent verses to it. It is too much, at least for my humble rustic muse, to expect that every effort of hers shall have merit; still I think that it is better to have mediocre verses to a favourite air, than none at all. On this principle I have all along proceeded in the "Scots Musical Museum," and as that publication is at its last volume, I intend the following song, to the air above-mentioned, for that work.

If it does not suit you as an editor, you may be pleased to have verses to it that you can sing before ladies.

SHE SAYS SHE LOES ME BEST OF A!*

ALLEGROTTTO.

TUNE—"Onagh's Water-fall."

Sae flax - en were her ring - lets, Her eye - brows of a dark - er hue,
 De - wick - ing - ly o'er - arch - ing Twa laugh - ing een o' bou - nie blue.
 Her smil - ing sae wyl - ing, Wad make a wretch for - get his woe;
 What pleas - ure, what treas - ure, Un - to these ro - sy lips to grow:
 Such was my Chlo - ris' bon - nie face, Wheu first her bou - nie face I saw,
 And aye my Chlo - ris' dear - est charm, She says she lo'es me best of a'.

* Miss Jean Lorimer.

Like harmony her motion;
 Her pretty ankle is a spy,
 Betraying fair proportion,
 Wad mak' a saint forget the sky.
 Sae warming, sae charming,
 Her faultless form and gracefu' air;
 Her feature—auld Nature
 Declar'd that she could do nae mair:
 Her's are the willing chains o' love,
 By conquering beauty's sovereign law;
 And aye my Chloris' dearest charm,
 She says she lo'es me best of a'.

Let others love the city
 And gaudy show at sunny noon;
 Gie me the lonely valley,
 The dewy eve, and rising moon
 Fair beaming, and streaming,
 Her silver light the boughs amang;
 While falling, recalling,
 The amorous thrush concludes his sang:
 There, dearest Chloris, wilt thou rove
 By wimpling burn and leafy shaw,
 And hear my vows o' truth and love,
 And say thou lo'est me best of a'.

Not to compare small things with great, my taste in music is like the mighty Frederick of Prussia's taste in painting: we are told that he frequently admired what the connoisseurs decried, and always without any hypocrisy confessed his admiration. I am sensible that my taste in music must be inelegant and vulgar, because people of undisputed and cultivated taste can find no merit in my favourite tunes. Still, because I am cheaply pleased, is that any reason why I should deny myself that pleasure? Many of our strathspeys, ancient and modern, give me most exquisite enjoyment, where you and other judges would probably be showing disgust. For instance, I am just now making verses for "Rothemurehe's Rant," an air which puts me in raptures; and in fact, unless I be pleased with the tune, I never can make verses to it. Here I have Clarke on my side, who is a judge that I will put against any of you. "Rothemurehe," he says, is an air both original and beautiful; and on his recommendation I have taken the first part of the tune for a chorus, and the fourth or last part for the song. I am but two stanzas deep in the work, and possibly you may think, and justly, that the poetry is as little worth your attention as the music.†

I have begun anew "Let me in this ae night." Do you think that we ought to retain the old chorus? I think

† "In the original MS. two stanzas of a song, beginning 'Lassie wi' the lint-white locks,' are here inserted. It will be found at full length afterwards."—CURRIE.

we must retain both the old chorus and the first stanza of the old song. I do not altogether like the third line of the first stanza, but cannot alter it to please myself. I am just three stanzas deep in it. Would you have the *denouement* to be successful or otherwise? Should she "let him in" or not?

Did you not once propose "The Sow's tail to Geordie," as an air for your work? I am quite delighted with it; but I acknowledge that is no mark of its real excellence. I once set about verses for it, which I meant to be in the alternate way of a lover and his mistress chanting together. I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Thomson's Christian name, and yours I am afraid is rather burlesque for sentiment, else I had meant to have made you the hero and heroine of the little piece.

How do you like the following epigram, which I wrote the other day on a lovely young girl's recovery from a fever? Doctor Maxwell was the physician who seemingly saved her from the grave; and to whom I address the following:—

TO DR. MAXWELL.*

ON MISS JESSIE STAIG'S RECOVERY.†

Maxwell, if merit here you crave,
That merit I deny:
You save fair Jessie from the grave?
An angel could not die.

God grant you patience with this stupid epistle!



No. LVIII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

I PERCEIVE the sprightly muse is now attendant upon her favourite poet, "whose wood-notes wild" are become as enchanting as ever. "She says she lo'es me best of a," is one of the most pleasant table songs I have seen, and henceforth shall be mine when the song is going round. I'll give Cunningham a copy; he can more powerfully proclaim its merit. I am far from undervaluing your taste for the strathspey music: on the contrary, I think it highly animating and agreeable, and that some of the strathspeys, when graced with such verses as yours, will make very pleasing songs; in the same way that rough Christians are tempered and softened by lovely woman, without whom, you know, they had been brutes.

* Dr. Maxwell, two years afterwards, was the poet's physician on his own death-bed.

† Miss Staig was afterwards married to Major Miller, but died young. See Note to song entitled "Jessie."

I am clear for having the "Sow's tail," particularly as your proposed verses to it are so extremely promising. Geordie, as you observe, is a name only fit for burlesque composition. Mrs. Thomson's name (Katharine) is not at all poetical. Retain Jeanie, therefore, and make the other Jamie, or any other that sounds agreeably.

Your "Ca' the ewes" is a precious little morceau. Indeed I am perfectly astonished and charmed with the endless variety of your fancy. Here let me ask you whether you never seriously turned your thoughts upon dramatic writing? That is a field worthy of your genius, in which it might shine forth in all its splendour. One or two successful pieces upon the London stage would make your fortune. The rage at present is for musical dramas. Few or none of those which have appeared since the "Duenna" possess much poetical merit; there is little in the conduct of the fable, or in the dialogue, to interest the audience. They are chiefly vehicles for music and pageantry. I think you might produce a comic opera in three acts, which would live by the poetry, at the same time that it would be proper to take every assistance from her tuneful sister. Part of the songs of course would be to our favourite Scottish airs; the rest might be left to the London composer—Storace for Drury-lane, or Shield for Covent-garden; both of them very able and popular musicians. I believe that interest and manœuvring are often necessary to have a drama brought on; so it may be with the namby-pamby tribe of flowery scribblers; but were you to address Mr. Sheridan himself by letter, and send him a dramatic piece, I am persuaded he would, for the honour of genius, give it a fair and candid trial. Excuse me for obtruding these hints upon your consideration.



No. LIX.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 14th October, 1794.

THE last eight days have been devoted to the re-examination of the Scottish collections. I have read, and sung, and fiddled, and considered till I am half blind, and wholly stupid. The few airs I have added are inclosed.

Peter Pindar has at length sent me all the songs I expected from him, which are in general elegant and beautiful. Have you heard of a London collection of Scottish airs and songs, just published by Mr. Ritson, an Englishman? I shall send you a copy. His introductory essay on the subject is curious, and evinces great reading and research, but does not decide the question as to the

origin of our melodies; though he shows clearly that Mr. Tytler, in his ingenious dissertation, has adduced no sort of proof of the hypothesis he wished to establish, and that his classification of the airs, according to the eras when they were composed, is mere fancy and conjecture. On John Pinkerton, Esq., he has no mercy, but consigns him to damnation! He snarls at my publication, on the score of Pindar being engaged to write songs for it; uncandidly and unjustly leaving it to be inferred, that the songs of Scottish writers had been sent a-packing to make room for Peter's! Of you he speaks with some respect, but gives you a passing hit or two for daring to dress up a little some old foolish songs for the "Museum." His sets of the Scottish airs are taken, he says, from the oldest collections and best authorities. Many of them, however, have such a strange aspect, and are so unlike the sets which are sung by every person of taste, old or young, in town or country, that we can scarcely recognize the features of our favourites. By going to the oldest collections of our music, it does not follow that we find the melodies in their original state. These melodies had been preserved, we know not how long, by oral communication, before being collected and printed; and as different persons sing the same air very differently, according to their accurate or confused recollection of it, so even supposing the first collectors to have possessed the industry, the taste, and discernment to choose the best they could hear (which is far from certain), still it must evidently be a chance whether the collections exhibit any of the melodies in the state they were first composed. In selecting the melodies for my own collection, I have been as much guided by the living as by the dead. Where these differed, I preferred the sets that appeared to me the most simple and beautiful, and the most generally approved: and without meaning any compliment to my own capability of choosing, or speaking of the pains I have taken, I flatter myself that my sets will be found equally freed from vulgar errors on the one hand, and affected graces on the other.



No. LX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

19th October, 1794.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

By this morning's post I have your list, and, in general, I highly approve of it. I shall at more leisure give you a critique on the whole. Clarke goes to your town by to-day's fly, and I wish you would call on him and take his opinion in general: you know his taste is a

standard. He will return here again in a week or two; so, please do not miss asking for him. One thing I hope he will do—persuade you to adopt my favourite, "Craigieburn Wood," in your selection: it is as great a favourite of his as of mine. The lady on whom it was made is one of the finest women in Scotland; and in fact (*entre nous*) is in a manner to me what Sterne's Eliza was to him—a mistress, or friend, or what you will, in the guileless simplicity of Platonic love. (Now don't put any of your squinting constructions on this, or have any clishmaclavier about it among our acquaintances). I assure you that to my lovely friend you are indebted for many of your best songs of mine. Do you think that the sober, gin-horse routine of existence, could inspire a man with life, and love, and joy—could fire him with enthusiasm, or melt him with pathos, equal to the genius of your book? No! no!—Whenever I want to be more than ordinary in song—to be in some degree equal to your diviner airs—do you imagine I fast and pray for the celestial emanation? *Tout au contraire!* I have a glorious recipe; the very one that for his own use was invented by the divinity of healing and poetry, when erst he piped to the flocks of Admetus. I put myself in a regimen of admiring a fine woman; and in proportion to the adorability of her charms, in proportion you are delighted with my verses. The lightning of her eye is the godhead of Parnassus, and the witchery of her smile the divinity of Helicon!

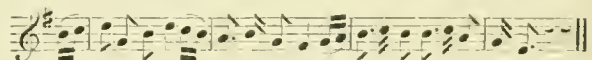
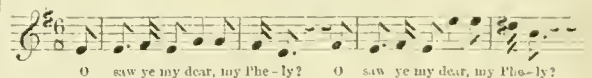
To descend to business; if you like my idea of, "When she cam' ben she bobbie," the following stanzas of mine, altered a little from what they were formerly when set to another air, may perhaps do instead of worse stanzas:—

SAW YE MY PHELY.*

(QUASI DICAT PHILLIS).

ALLEGRETTO.

TUNE—"When she cam' ben she bobbie."



She's down i' the grove, she's wi' a new love, She winna come hame to her Willy.

What says she, my dear, my Phely?
 What says she, my dear, my Phely?
 She lets thee to wit that she has thee forgot,
 And for ever disowns thee, her Willy.

O had I ne'er seen thee, my Phely!
 O had I ne'er seen thee, my Phely!
 As light as the air, and fause as thou's fair,
 Thou's broken the heart o' thy Willy.

Now for a few miscellaneous remarks. "The Posie"

* The subjects of this song were Miss Phillis M-Murdo and her "despairing swain," Stephen Clarke, the musician.

(in the "Museum") is my composition; the air was taken down from Mrs. Burns' voice. It is well known in the West country, but the old words are trash. By the bye, take a look at the tune again, and tell me if you do not think it is the original from which "Roslin Castle" is composed. The second part, in particular, for the first two or three bars, is exactly the old air. "Strathallan's Lament" is mine; the music is by our right trusty and deservedly well-beloved Allan Masterton. "Donocht-Head" is not mine; I would give ten pounds it were. It appeared first in the *Edinburgh Herald*; and came to the editor of that paper with the Newcastle post-mark on it.* "Whistle o'er the lave o't" is mine; the music said

* The reader will be curious to see this poem, so highly praised by Burns. Here it is:—

Keen blows the wind o'er Donocht-Head,
The snaw drives snelly thro' the dale,
The Gaberlunzie tirls my sneck,
And shivering tells his wae fu' tale:
"Cauld is the night, O let me in,
And dinna let your minstrel fa',
And dinna let his winding-sheet
Be naething but a wreath o' snaw.

"Full ninety winters ha'e I seen,
And pip'd where gor-cocks whirling flew,
And mony a day I've danc'd, I ween,
To liltis which from my drone I blew."
My Eppie wak'd, and soon she cry'd,
"Get up, guidman, and let him in;
For weel ye ken the winter night
Was short when he began his din."

My Eppie's voice, O wow! it's sweet,
Even tho' she bans and scandals a wee;
But when it's tun'd to sorrow's tale,
O, haith, it's doubly dear to me!
"Come in, auld carle, I'll steer my fire,
I'll make it bleeze a bonnie flame;
Your bluid is thin, ye've tint the gate,
Ye shouldna stray sae far frae hame."

"Nae hame have I," the minstrel said,
"Sad party-strife o'erturn'd my la';
And, weeping at the eve of life,
I wander thro' a wreath o' snaw."

* This affecting poem is apparently incomplete. The author need not be ashamed to avow himself. It is worthy of Burns, or of Macneill.—CURRIE.

These verses were written by William Pickering, a poor North of England poet. Another has completed the song:—

"Wae's me, auld carle! sad is your tale;
Your scrip is toom, your clauthing thin;
Mine's no the hand to steek the door,
When want and wae wad fain be in."

Wi' tottering step he reached the spence,
Whar sunn the ingle bleezed fu' hie;
The auld man thought bimself at hame,
While the tear stood twinkling in his e'e.
He took his pipes and played a spring;
But oh, it was a strain of woe;
It spak of Scotland's chiefs and king,
And wail'd a nation's overthrow.

Captain Charles Gray of the Royal Marines, author of several popular lyrics, is the author of these additional verses. A fine little fellow from Anstruther, an early friend of Dr. Chalmers.

to be by a John Bruce, a celebrated violin player in Dumfries about the beginning of this century. This I know: Bruce, who was an honest man, though a red-wud Highlandman, constantly claimed it, and by all the old musical people here is believed to be the author of it.

"Andrew and his cutty gun." The song to which this is set in the "Museum" is mine, and was composed on Miss Enphemia Murray, of Lintrose, commonly and deservedly called the Flower of Strathmore.

"How long and dreary is the night!" I met with some such words in a collection of songs somewhere, which I altered and enlarged; and to please you, and to suit your favourite air, I have taken a stride or two across my room, and have arranged it anew, as you will find on the other page:—

HOW LONG AND DREARY IS THE NIGHT.†

MODERATE.

TUNE—"Cauld Kail in Aberdeen."

How long and drear-y is the night, When I am frae my dear-ie!

I rest-less lie frae e'en to morn, Though I were ne'er sae wear-y.

For oh, her lane-ly nights are lang; And oh, her dreams are eer-le;

And oh, her wid-ow'd heart is sair, That's ab-sent frae her dear-ie.

When I think on the lightsome days
I spent wi' thee, my dearie;

† The earlier version of this song, which was sent to the "Museum," is here supplied, and appears to be better adapted to the words.

HOW LONG AND DREARY IS THE NIGHT.

ANDANTE.

TUNE—"A Gaelic Air."

How lang and drear-y is the night, When I am frae my dear-ie!

I sleep-less lie frae e'en to morn, Tho' I were ne'er so wear-y.

I sleep-less lie frae e'en to morn, Tho' I were ne'er so wear-y.

When I think on the happy days
I spent wi' you, my dearie:
And now what lands between us lie,
How can I be but eerie?
And now what lands between us lie,
How can I be but eerie?

How slow ye move, ye heavy homs,
As ye were wae and weary!
It was na sae ye glinted by,
When I was wi' my dearie!
It was na sae ye glinted by,
When I was wi' my dearie!

And now what seas between us rear—
How can I be but eerie !
For oh, her lonely nights, &c.

How slow ye move, ye heavy hours,
The joyless day how dreary !
It was na sae ye glinted by,
When I was wi' my dearie,
For oh, her lonely nights, &c.

Tell me how you like this. I differ from your idea of the expression of the tune. There is, to me, a great deal of tenderness in it. You cannot, in my opinion, dispense with a bass to your addenda airs. A lady of my acquaintance, a noted performer, plays and sings at the same time so charmingly, that I shall never bear to see any of her songs sent into the world as naked as Mr. What-d'ye-call-um has done in his London collection.*

These English songs gravel me to death. I have not that command of the language that I have of my native tongue. I have been at "Duncan Gray," to dress it in English, but all I can do is deplorably stupid. For instance:—

LET NOT WOMAN E'ER COMPLAIN.

LIVELY. TUNE—"Duncan Gray."

Let not woman e'er com - plain Of in - con - stan - cy in love;
Let not woman e'er com - plain Fickle man is apt to rove;
Look abroad through Nature's range, Nature's mighty law is change;
La - dies, wou'd it not be strange, Man should then a monster prove?

Mark the winds, and mark the skies,
Ocean's ebb, and ocean's flow;
Sun and moon but set to rise,
Round and round the seasons go.
Why then ask of silly man,
To oppose great Nature's plan?
We'll be constant while we can—
You can be no more, you know.

Since the above I have been out in the country taking a dinner with a friend, where I met with the lady whom I mentioned in the second page in this odds-and-ends of a letter.† As usual, I got into song; and returning home I composed the following:—

* Mr. Ritson.

† Jean Lorimer.

THE LOVER'S MORNING SALUTE TO HIS MISTRESS.

ANDANTE. TUNE—"Deil tak the Wars"

Sleep at thou, or wak at thou, Fair est crea - ture! Ho - sy thorn thou
lifts his eye, Numbering ilk - a bud which Na - ture
Wa - ters wi the tears o' Joy. Now, ‡ to the streaming fountain, or
up the heathy mountain, The hart, hind, and roe, freely, wildly wan - ton stray; In
twin - ing haz - el bow'rs, His try the lin - net pours; The lav'rock to the sky
A - scends, wi' sangs o' Joy, While the sun and thou a - rise to bless the day

Phœbus gilding the brow o' morning,
Banishes ilk darksome shade,
Nature gladdening and adorning;
Such to me my lovely maid.
When § frae my Chloris parted,
Sad, cheerless, broken-hearted,
The night's gloomy shades, cloudy, dark, o'ercast my sky.
But when she charms my sight,
In pride of Beauty's light—
When through my very heart
Her burning glories dart;
'Tis then, 'tis then I wake to life and joy!

If you honour my verses by setting the air to them, I will vamp up the old song, and make it English enough to be understood.

I inclose you a musical curiosity, an East Indian air, which you would swear was a Scottish one. I know the

‡ MS. variation:—

Now through the leafy woods,
And by the reeking floods,
Wild Natnre's tenants freely, gladly stray;
The lintwhite in his bower,
Chants o'er the breathing flower;
The lav'rock, &c.

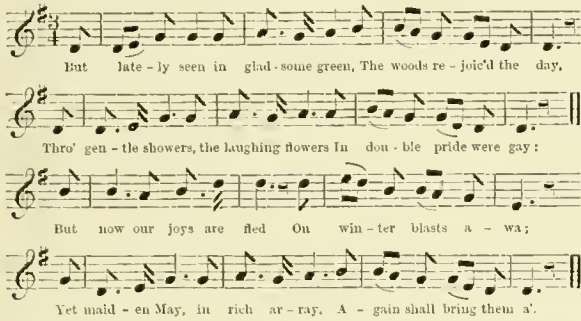
§ MS. variation:—

When absent frae my Fair,
The murky shades of care
With starless gloom o'ercast my sullen sky;
But when in Beauty's light
She meets my ravish'd sight,
When through my very heart
Her beaming glories dart,
'Tis then I wake to life, to light, and joy!

authenticity of it, as the gentleman who brought it over is a particular acquaintance of mine. Do preserve me the copy I send you, as it is the only one I have. Clarke has set a bass to it, and I intend putting it into the "Musical Museum." Here follow the verses I intend for it:—

THE WINTER OF LIFE.*

VERY SLOW.



But my white pow, uae kindly thowe
Shall melt the snaws of Age;
My trunk of eild, but buss or beild,
Sinks in Time's wintry rage.
Oh, Age has weary days,
And nights o' sleepless pain:
Thou golden time o' Youthfu' prime,
Why comes thou not again?

I would be obliged to you if you would procure me a sight of Ritson's collection of English songs, which you mention in your letter. I will thank you for another information, and that as speedily as you please: whether this miserable, drawling, hotchpotch epistle has not completely tired you of my correspondence?



No. LXI.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 27th October, 1794.

I AM sensible, my dear friend, that a gemine poet can no more exist without his mistress than his meat. I wish I knew the adorable She, whose bright eyes and witching smiles have so often enraptured the Scottish bard! that I might drink her sweet health when the toast is going round. "Craigieburn Wood" must certainly be adopted

* Steenhouse says the tune is apparently borrowed from the English air of "Chevy-Chace" in Dale's collection.

into my family, since she is the object of the song; but, in the name of decency, I must beg a new chorus verse from you. "O to be lying beyond thee, dearie," is perhaps a consummation to be wished, but will not do for singing in the company of ladies. The songs in your last will do you lasting credit, and suit the respective airs charmingly. I am perfectly of your opinion with respect to the additional airs. The idea of sending them into the world naked as they were born was ungenerous. They must all be clothed and made decent by our friend Clarke.

I find I am anticipated by the friendly Cunningham in sending you Ritson's Scottish collection. Permit me, therefore, to present you with his English collection, which you will receive by the coach. I do not find his Historical Essay on Scottish song interesting. Your anecdotes and miscellaneous remarks will, I am sure, be much more so. Allan has just sketched a charming design from "Maggie Lauder." She is dancing with such spirit as to electrify the piper, who seems almost dancing too, while he is playing with the most exquisite glee. I am much inclined to get a small copy, and to have it engraved in the style of Ritson's prints.

P.S.—Pray, what do your anecdotes say concerning "Maggie Lauder?" was she a real personage, and of what rank? You would surely "spier for her, if you ca'd at Anstruther town."†



No. LXII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

November, 1794.

MANY thanks to you, my dear Sir, for your present; it is a book of the utmost importance to me. I have yesterday begun my anecdotes, &c., for your work. I intend draw-

† "In consequence," says Mr. Robert Chambers, "of an enthusiasm upon such subjects, the writer of these pages [“The Picture of Scotland”] did not neglect, on visiting Anstruther, to “spier for Maggie Lauder.” He was pleased to find that the inhabitants of that town have not only preserved the tradition of her existence, but even know the exact place of her residence. She lived, and practised (it seems) not the most reputable profession, in the “East Green of Anster,” a low street, connecting the town with the adjacent fishing village of Cellardykes. Her house was a cot of one story, and stood upon the north side of the street, at the west end of two more modern little cottages, almost opposite to a tannery. The spot is now occupied by a garden, which extends a good way back. The house itself has not existed within the memory of the present generation; but all the people concur in pointing out this as its site. It ought, however, to be mentioned that, in opposition to the popular legend regarding this renowned lady, the Anstruther family have a tradition that she was a person of condition, and connected with their ancient house.”

ing it up in the form of a letter to you, which will save me from the tedious dull business of systematic arrangement. Indeed, as all I have to say consists of unconnected remarks, anecdotes, scraps of old songs, &c., it would be impossible to give the work a beginning, a middle, and an end, which the critics insist to be absolutely necessary in a work.* In my last, I told you my objections to the song you had selected for "My lodging is on the cold ground." On my visit the other day to my fair Chloris (that is the poetic name of the lovely goddess of my inspiration), she suggested an idea, which I, in my return from the visit, wrought into the following song:—

CHLORIS.†

TUNE—"Away to bonnie Tweedside."

My Chlo - ris, mark how green the groves, The priu - rose banks how fair;

The balm - y gales a - wake the flowers, And wave thy flax - en hair.

The lav'rock shuns the palace gay, And o'er the cot - tage sings;

For Na - ture smiles as sweet, I ween, To shepherds as to kings.

Let minstrels sweep the skilfu' string
In lordly lighted ha':
The shepherd stops his simple reed,
Blythe, in the birken shaw.
The princely revel may survey
Our rustic dance wi' scorn;
But are their hearts as light as ours
Beneath the milk-white thorn?

The shepherd in the flow'ry glen,
In shepherd's phrase will woo:
The courtier tells a finer tale,
But is his heart as true?
These wild-wood flowers I've pu'd, to deck
That spotless breast o' thine;
The courtier's gems may witness love—
But 'tis na love like mine.

How do you like the simplicity and tenderness of this pastoral? I think it pretty well.

I like you for entering so candidly and so kindly into the story of *ma chere Amie*. I assure you, I was never more in earnest in my life than in the account of that

* "It does not appear whether Burns completed these anecdotes, &c. Something of the kind (probably the rude draughts) was found amongst his papers, and appears elsewhere."—CURRIE.

† Miss Jean Lorimer. Burns afterwards altered the first three words of this song to "Behold my love," &c., see p. 144.

affair which I sent you in my last. Conjugal love is a passion which I deeply feel, and highly venerate; but, somehow, it does not make such a figure in poesy as that other species of the passion—

"Where Love is liberty, and Nature law."

Musically speaking, the first is an instrument of which the gamut is scanty and confined, but the tones inexpressibly sweet; while the last has powers equal to all the intellectual modulations of the human soul. Still, I am a very poet in my enthusiasm of the passion. The welfare and happiness of the beloved object is the first and inviolate sentiment that pervades my soul; and whatever pleasures I might wish for, or whatever might be the raptures they would give me, yet, if they interfere with that first principle, it is having these pleasures at a dishonest price; and justice forbids and generosity disdains the purchase!

Despairing of my own powers to give you variety enough in English songs, I have been turning over old collections, to pick out songs, of which the measure is something similar to what I want; and with a little alteration so as to suit the rhythm of the air exactly, to give you them for your work. Where the songs have hitherto been but little noticed, nor have ever been set to music, I think the shift a fair one. A song which, under the same first verse, you will find in Ramsay's "Tea-table Miscellany," I have cut down for an English dress to your "Dainty Davie," as follows:—

CHLOE.

ALTERED FROM AN OLD ENGLISH SONG.

LIVELY. TUNE—"Dainty Davie."

It was the charming month of May, When all the flow'rs were fresh and gay,
From peaceful slumber she a - rose, Girt on her man - tie and her hose.

One morning, by the break of day, The youth - ful, charm - ing Chlo - e;
And o'er the flow'ry mead she goes, The youth - ful, charm - ing Chlo - e.

CHORUS—Lovely was she by the dawn, Youthful Chlo - e, charming Chlo - e.

Tripping o'er the pearly lawn, The youthful, charming Chlo - e.

The feather'd people you might see
Perch'd all around on every tree;
In notes of sweetest melody

They hail the charming Chloe;
Till, painting gay the eastern skies,
The glorious sun began to rise,
Out-rivall'd by the radiant eyes

Of youthful, charming Chloe.

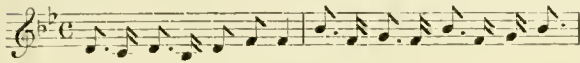
Lovely was she, &c.

You may think meanly of this, but take a look at the bombast original, and you will be surprised that I have made so much of it. I have finished my song to "Rothemurche's Rant;" and you have Clarke to consult as to the set of the air for singing.

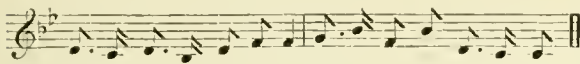
LASSIE WI' THE LINT-WHITE LOCKS.*

ALLEGRETTO.

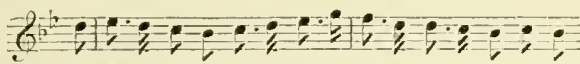
TUNE—"Rothemurche's Rant."



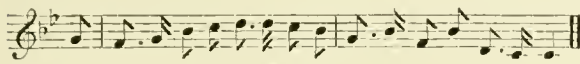
CHORUS—Las - sie wi' the lint-white locks, Bon - nie las - sie, art - less las - sie,



Wilt thou wi' me tent the flocks? Wilt thou be my dear - ie, O?



SONG—Now Na - ture cleeds the flow'ry lea, And a' is young and sweet like thee;



O wilt thou share its joys wi' me, And say thou'lt be my dear - ie, O?

And when the welcome simmer shower
Has cheer'd ilk drooping little flower,
We'll to the breathing woodbine bower
At sultry noon, my dearie, O.
Lassie wi' the lint-white, &c.

When Cynthia lights, with silver ray,
The weary shearer's hameward way,
Through yellow waving fields we'll stray,
And talk o' love, my dearie, O.
Lassie wi' the lint-white, &c.

And when the howling wintry blast
Disturbs my lassie's midnight rest,
Enclasp'd to my faithful breast,
I'll comfort thee, my dearie, O.†
Lassie wi' the lint-white, &c.

This piece has at least the merit of being a regular pastoral: the vernal morn, the summer noon, the autumnal evening, and the winter night, are regularly rounded. If you like it, well: if not, I will insert it in the "Museum."

* Miss Jean Lorimer.

† MS. variation:—

And should the howling wintry blast
Disturb my lassie's midnight rest,
I'll fault thee to my faithful breast,
And comfort thee, my dearie, O.

No. LXIII.‡

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

I AM out of temper that you should set so sweet, so tender an air, as "Deil tak' the wars," to the foolish old verses. You talk of the silliness of "Saw ye my father?" by heavens! the odds is gold to brass! Besides, the old song, though now pretty well modernized into the Scottish language, is originally, and in the early editions, a bungling low imitation of the Scottish manner, by that genius Tom D'Urfey: so has no pretensions to be a Scottish production. There is a pretty English song by Sheridan, in the "Duenna," to this air, which is out of sight superior to D'Urfey's. It begins—

"When sable night each drooping plant restoring."

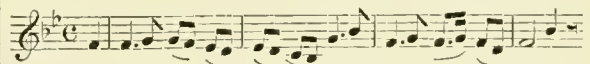
The air, if I understand the expression of it properly, is the very native language of simplicity, tenderness, and love. I have again gone over my song to the tune as follows. §

Now for my English song to "Nancy's to the Greenwood," &c.

FAREWELL, THOU STREAM.

ANDANTE.

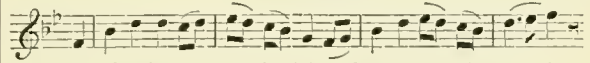
TUNE—"Nancy's to the Greenwood gane."



Farewell, thou stream that wind - ing flows Around E - liz - as dwelling!



O mien'ry! spare the cru - el throes Within my bos - om swelling;



Condemn'd to drag a hope - less chain, And yet in se - cret languish;



To feel a fire in ev' - ry vein, Nor dare dis - close my anguish.

Love's veriest wretch, unseen, unknown,
I fain my griefs would cover:
The bursting sigh, th' unweeting groan,
Betray the hapless lover.
I know thou doom'st me to despair,
Nor wilt, nor canst relieve me;
But oh! Eliza, hear one prayer—
For pity's sake forgive me!

‡ The letter here marked No. LXIII. forms part of No. LXII. in Currie's edition.

§ See the song in its first and best dress given elsewhere, with the title of "The Lover's Morning Salute to his Mistress." Burns remarks upon it, "I could easily throw this into an English mould; but, to my taste, in the simple and the tender of the pastoral song, a sprinkling of the old Scottish has an inimitable effect."

The music of thy voice I heard,
 Nor wist while it enslav'd me ;
 I saw thine eyes, yet nothing fear'd,
 Till fears no more had sav'd me :
 Th' unwary sailor thus aghast,
 The wheeling torrent viewing,
 'Mid circling horrors sinks at last
 In overwhelming ruin.

There is an air, "The Caledonian Hunt's delight," to which I wrote a song that you will find in Johnson — "Ye banks an' braes o' bonnie Doon ;" this air, I think, might find a place among your hundred, as Lear says of his knights. Do you know the history of the air ? It is curious enough. A good many years ago, Mr. James Miller, writer in your good town, a gentleman whom possibly you know, was in company with our friend Clarke ; and talking of Scottish music, Miller expressed an ardent ambition to be able to compose a Scots air. Mr. Clarke, partly by way of joke, told him to keep to the black keys of the harpsichord, and preserve some kind of rhythm, and he would infallibly compose a Scots air. Certain it is, that in a few days Mr. Miller produced the rudiments of an air, which Mr. Clarke, with some touches and corrections, fashioned into the tune in question. Ritson, you know, has the same story of the black keys ; but this account which I have just given you Mr. Clarke informed me of several years ago. Now, to show you how difficult it is to trace the origin of our airs, I have heard it repeatedly asserted that this was an Irish air ; nay, I met with an Irish gentleman who affirmed he had heard it in Ireland among the old women ; while, on the other hand, a countess informed me that the first person who introduced the air into this country was a baronet's lady of her acquaintance, who took down the notes from an itinerant piper in the Isle of Man. How difficult, then, to ascertain the truth respecting our poesy and music ! I myself have lately seen a couple of ballads sung through the streets of Dumfries, with my name at the head of them as the author, though it was the first time I had ever seen them.

I thank you for admitting "Craigieburn Wood ;" and I shall take care to furnish you with a new chorus. In fact, the chorus was not my work, but a part of some old verses to the air. If I can catch myself in a more than ordinarily propitious moment, I shall write a new "Craigieburn Wood" altogether. My heart is much in the theme.

I am ashamed, my dear fellow, to make the request ; 'tis dunning your generosity : but in a moment when I had forgotten whether I was rich or poor, I promised Chloris a copy of your songs. It wrings my honest pride to write you this : but an ungracious request is doubly so by a tedious apology. To make you some amends, as

soon as I have extracted the necessary information out of them, I will return you Ritson's volumes.

The lady is not a little proud that she is to make so distinguished a figure in your collection, and I am not a little proud that I have it in my power to please her so much. Lucky it is for your patience that my paper is done, for when I am in a scribbling humour I know not when to give over.



No. LXIV.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

15th November, 1794.

MY GOOD SIR,

SINCE receiving your last I have had another interview with Mr. Clarke, and a long consultation. He thinks the "Caledonian Hunt" is more Bacchanalian than amorous in its nature, and recommends it to you to match the air accordingly. Pray, did it ever occur to you how peculiarly well the Scottish airs are adapted for verses in the form of a dialogue ? The first part of the air is generally low, and suited for a man's voice ; and the second part in many instances cannot be sung, at concert pitch, but by a female voice. A song thus performed makes an agreeable variety, but few of ours are written in this form : I wish you would think of it in some of those that remain. The only one of the kind you have sent me is admirable, and will be a universal favourite.

Your verses for "Rothenmurchie" are so sweetly pastoral, and your serenade to Chloris, for "Deil tak' the wars," so passionately tender, that I have sung myself into raptures with them. Your song for "My lodging is on the cold ground" is likewise a diamond of the first water : I am quite dazzled and delighted by it. Some of your Chlorises, I suppose, have flaxen hair, from your partiality for this colour ; else we differ about it ; for I should scarcely conceive a woman to be a beauty, on reading that she had lint-white locks !

"Farewell thou stream that winding flows," I think excellent, but it is much too serious to come after "Nancy : " at least it would seem an incongruity to provide the same air with merry Scottish and melancholy English verses ! The more that the two sets of verses resemble each other, in their general character, the better. Those you have manufactured for "Dainty Davie" will answer charmingly. I am happy to find you have begun your anecdotes : I care not how long they be, for it is impossible that any thing from your pen can be tedious. Let me beseech you

not to use ceremony in telling me when you wish to present any of your friends with the songs: the next carrier will bring you three copies, and you are as welcome to twenty as to a pinch of snuff.



No. LXV.

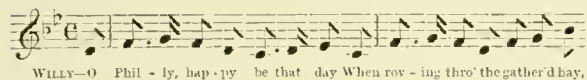
BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

19th November, 1794.

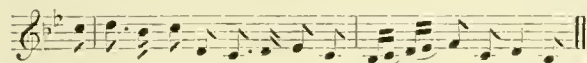
You see, my dear Sir, what a punctual correspondent I am; though indeed you may thank yourself for the *tedium* of my letters, as you have so flattered me on my horsemanship with my favourite hobby, and have praised the grace of his ambling so much, that I am scarcely ever off his back. For instance, this morning, though a keen blowing frost, in my walk before breakfast I finished my duet, which you were pleased to praise so much. Whether I have uniformly succeeded I will not say; but here it is for you, though it is not an hour old.

O PHILLY, HAPPY BE THAT DAY.

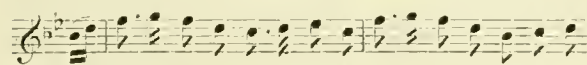
TUNE—"The Sow's Tail to Georgie."



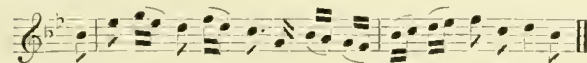
WILLY—O Phil - ly, hap - py be that day When rov - ing thro' the gather'd hay,



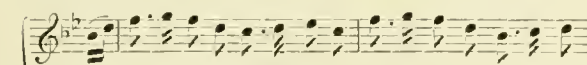
My youth - fu' heart was stown a - way, And by thy charms, my Phil - ly.



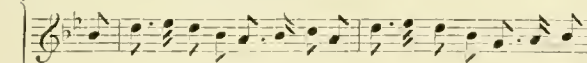
PHILLY—O Wil - ly, aye I bless the grove Where first I own'd my maiden love,



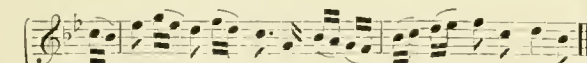
Whilst thou did pledge the Powers a - bove To he my ain dear Wil - ly.



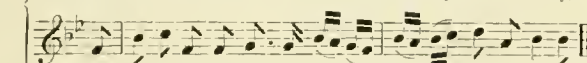
DEET—For a' the joys that gowd can gie I din - na care a sing - le fie!



For a' the joys that gowd can gie I diu - na care a sing - le fie!



The lad I love's the lad for me, And that's my ain dear Wil - ly.



The lass I love's the lass for me, And that's my ain dear Phil - ly.

Willy. As songsters of the early year
Are ilka day mair sweet to hear,
So ilka day to me mair dear
And charming is my Philly.

Philly. As on the brier the budding rose
Still richer breathes and fairer blows,
So in my tender bosom grows
The love I bear my Willy.

Both. For a' the joys, &c.

Willy. The milder sun and bluer sky,
That crown my harvest cares wi' joy,
Were ne'er sae welcome to my eye
As is a sight o' Philly.

Philly. The little swallow's wanton wing,
Tho' wafting o'er the flowery spring,
Did ne'er to me sic tidings bring,
As meeting o' my Willy.

Both. For a' the joys, &c.

Willy. The bee that thro' the sunny hour
Sips nectar in the opening flower,
Compar'd wi' my delight is poor,
Upon the lips o' Philly.

Philly. The woodbine in the dewy weat,
When evening shades in silence meet,
Is nocht sae fragrant or sae sweet
As is a kiss o' Willy.

Both. For a' the joys, &c.

Willy. Let fortune's wheel at random rin,
And fools may tyme, and knaves may win;
My thoughts are a' bound up in ane,
And that's my ain dear Philly.

Philly. What's a' the joys that gowd can gie?
I dinna care a single fie;
The lad I love's the lad for me,
And that's my ain dear Willy.

Both. For a' the joys, &c.

Tell me honestly how you like it; and point out whatever you think faulty.

I am much pleased with your idea of singing our songs in alternate stanzas, and regret that you did not hint it to me sooner. In those that remain, I shall have it in my eye. I remember your objections to the name Philly: but it is the common abbreviation of Phillis. Sally, the only other name that suits, has to my ear a vulgarity about it, which unfits it for any thing except burlesque. The legion of Scottish poetasters of the day, whom your brother editor, Mr. Ritson, ranks with me as my coevals, have always mistaken vulgarity for simplicity: whereas, simplicity is as much *éloignée* from vulgarity, on the one hand, as from affected point and puerile conceit on the other.

I agree with you as to the air, "Craigieburn Wood,"

that a chorus would in some degree spoil the effect, and shall certainly have none in my projected song to it. It is not, however, a case in point with "Rothemurche;" there, as in "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch," a chorus goes to my taste well enough. As to the chorus going first, that is the case with "Roy's Wife," as well as "Rothemurche." In fact, in the first part of both tunes the rhythm is so peculiar and irregular, and on that irregularity depends so much of their beauty, that we must e'en take them with all their wildness, and humour the verse accordingly. Leaving out the starting note in both tunes has I think, an effect that no regularity could counterbalance the want of.

Try,	{ O Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch.
and	{ O Lassie wi' the lint-white locks.
compare with,	{ Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch.
	{ Lassie wi' the lint-white locks.

Does not the tameness of the prefixed syllable strike you? In the last case, with the true furor of genius, you strike at once into the wild originality of the air; whereas, in the first insipid method, it is like the grating screw of the pins before the fiddle is brought into tune. This is my taste; if I am wrong, I beg pardon of the *cognoscenti*.

"The Caledonian Hunt" is so charming, that it would make any subject in a song go down; but pathos is certainly its native tongue. Scottish Bacchanalians we certainly want, though the few we have are excellent. For instance, "Todlin hame" is, for wit and humour, an unparalleled composition; and "Andrew and his cutty Gun" is the work of a master. By the way, are you not quite vexed to think that those men of genius, for such they certainly were, who composed our fine Scottish lyrics, should be unknown? It has given me many a heart-ache. Apropos to Bacchanalian songs in Scottish; I composed one yesterday for an air I like much—"Lumps o' pudding."

CONTENTED WI' LITTLE.

WITH SPIRIT. TUNE—"Lumps o' Pudding."

Con - tent - ed wi' lit - tle, and can - tie wi' mair, When'er I for - gath - er wi' sor - row and care, I gi'e them a skelp, as they're creepin' along. Wi' a cog o' guld swats, and an auld Scottish sang. I whyles claw the elbow o' troublesome thought; But man is a sod-ger, and life is a faught; My mirth and guid humour are coin in my pouch, And my freedom's my lairdship nae monarch dare touch.

A townmond o' trouble, should that be my fa',
A night o' guid fellowship southers it a':
When at the blythe end o' our journey at last,
Wha the de'il ever thinks o' the road he has past!
Blind chance, let her snapper and stoyte on her way,
Be't to me, be't frae me, e'en let the jade gae:
Come ease or come travail, come pleasure or pain,
My warst word is — "Welcome, and welcome again!"

If you do not relish this air, I will send it to Johnson.



No. LXVI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

SINCE yesterday's penmanship, I have framed a couple of English stanzas, by way of an English song to "Roy's Wife." You will allow me that, in this instance, my English corresponds in sentiment with the Scottish:—

CANST THOU LEAVE ME THUS, MY KATY.*

PATBETIC. TUNE—"Roy's Wife."

CHORUS—Canst thou leave me thus, my Ka - ty? Canst thou leave me thus, my Ka - ty?

Well thou know'st my ach - ing heart, And canst thou leave me thus for - gi - ty?

SONG—Is this thy plighted, fond re - gard, Thus cru - el - ly to part, my Ka - ty?

DA CARO.

Is this thy faithful swain's re - ward, An ach - ing, broken heart, my Ka - ty?

* "To this address, in the character of a forsaken lover, a reply was found, on the part of the lady, among the MSS. of our bard, evidently in a female hand-writing. The temptation to give it to the public is irresistible; and if in so doing offence should be given to the fair authoress, the beauty of her verses must plead our excuse:—

'Stay, my Willie—yet believe me,
Stay, my Willie—yet believe me,
For, ah! thou know'st na every pang
Wad wring my bosom shouldst thou leave me.

Tell me that thou yet art true,
And a' my wrongs shall be forgiven,
And when this heart proves false to thee,
Yon sun shall cease its course in heaven,

Farewell ! and ne'er such sorrows tear
 That fickle heart of thine, my Katy !
 Thon may'st find those will love thee dear—
 But not a love like mine, my Katy.
 Canst thou leave me thus, my Katy, &c.

Well ! I think this, to be done in two or three turns across my room, and with two or three pinches of Irish blackguard, is not so far amiss. You see I am determined to have my quantum of applause from somebody.

Tell my friend Allan (for I am sure that we only want the trifling circumstance of being known to one another, to be the best friends on earth), that I much suspect he has, in his plates, mistaken the figure of the stock and horn. I have, at last, gotten one; but it is a very rude instrument. It is composed of three parts—the stock, which is the hinder thigh-bone of a sheep, such as you see in a mutton ham; the horn, which is a common Highland cow's horn cut off at the smaller end, until the aperture be large enough to admit the stock to be pushed up through the horn until it be held by the thicker end of the thigh-bone; and lastly, an oaten reed exactly cut and notched like that which you see every shepherd boy have, when the corn stems are green and full grown. The reed is not made fast in the bone, but is held by the lips, and plays loose in the smaller end of the stock; while the stock, with the horn hanging on its larger end, is held by the hands in playing. The stock has six or seven ventages on the upper side, and one back ventage, like the common flute. This of mine was made by a man from the braes of Athole, and is exactly what the shepherds were wont to use in that country.

However, either it is not quite properly bored in the holes, or else we have not the art of blowing it rightly; for we can make little of it. If Mr. Allan chooses, I will send him a sight of mine; as I look on myself to be a kind of brother brush with him. "Pride in poets is nae sin;" and I will say it, that I look on Mr. Allan and Mr. Burns to be the only genuine and real painters of Scottish costume in the world.

' But to think I was betrayed,
 That falsehood e'er our loves should sunder !
 To take the flow'ret to my breast,
 And find the guilefu' serpent under.
 Stay, my Willie—yet believe me, &c.

' Could I hope thou 'dst ne'er deceive,
 Celestial pleasures might I choose 'em,
 I 'd slight, nor seek in other spheres
 That heaven I 'd find within thy bosom.
 Stay, my Willie—yet believe me, &c.

"It may amuse the reader to be told, that on this occasion the gentleman and the lady have exchanged the dialects of their respective countries. The Scottish Bard makes his address in pure English; the reply on the part of the lady, in the Scottish dialect, is, if we mistake not, by a young and beautiful Englishwoman."—CURRIE.

No. LXVII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

28th November, 1794.

I ACKNOWLEDGE, my dear Sir, you are not only the most punctual, but the most delectable correspondent I ever met with. To attempt flattering you never entered my head; the truth is, I look back with surprise at my impudence in so frequently nibbling at lines and couplets of your incomparable lyrics, for which, perhaps, if you had served me right, you would have sent me to the devil. On the contrary, however, you have all along condescended to invite my criticism with so much courtesy, that it ceases to be wonderful if I have sometimes given myself the airs of a reviewer. Your last budget demands unqualified praise: all the songs are charming, but the duet is a *chef d'œuvre*. "Lumps o' pudding" shall certainly make one of my family dishes; you have cooked it so capitally that it will please all palates. Do give us a few more of this cast when you find yourself in good spirits; these convivial songs are more wanted than those of the amorous kind, of which we have great choice. Besides, one does not often meet with a singer capable of giving the proper effect to the latter, while the former are easily sung, and acceptable to every body. I participate in your regret that the authors of some of our best songs are unknown: it is provoking to every admirer of genius.

I mean to have a picture painted from your beautiful ballad, "The Soldier's Return," to be engraved for one of my frontispieces. The most interesting point of time appears to me when she first recognizes her ain dear Willie, "She gaz'd, she reddened like a rose." The three lines immediately following are, no doubt, more impressive on the reader's feelings; but were the painter to fix on these, then you'll observe the animation and anxiety of her countenance is gone, and he could only represent her fainting in the soldier's arms. But I submit the matter to you, and beg your opinion.

Allan desires me to thank you for your accurate description of the stock and horn, and for the very gratifying compliment you pay him in considering him worthy of standing in a niche by the side of Burns in the Scottish Pantheon. He has seen the rude instrument you describe, so does not want you to send it; but wishes to know whether you believe it to have ever been generally used as a musical pipe by the Scottish shepherds, and when, and in what part of the country chiefly. I doubt much if it was capable of any thing but routing and roaring. A friend of mine says he remembers to have heard one in his younger days, made of wood instead of your bone, and that the sound was abominable.

Do not, I beseech you, return any books.

No. LXVIII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

December, 1794.

It is, I assure you, the pride of my heart to do any thing to forward, or add to the value of your book; and as I agree with you that the Jacobite song in the "Museum," to "There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame," would not so well consort with Peter Pindar's excellent love-song to that air, I have just framed for you the following:—

MV NANNIE'S AWA.*

ANDANTE.

Now in her green mantle blythe nature arrays, And list-ens
the land-kins that bleat o'er the braes, While birds warble welcome in
il-ka green shaw; But to me it's de-light-less—my Nan-nie's
a-wa'! But to me it's de-light-less—my Nan-nie's a-wa'!

The snaw-drop and primrose our woodlands adorn,
And violets bathe in the weat o' the morn;
They pain my sad bosom, sae sweetly they blaw,
They mind me o' Nannie—and Nannie's awa'!

Thou lav'rock that springs frae the dews of the lawn,
The shepherd to warn o' the grey-breaking dawn,
And thou mellow mavis that hails the night fa',
Give over for pity—my Nannie's awa'!

Come, Autumn, sae pensive, in yellow and grey,
And soothe me wi' tidings o' nature's decay:
The dark, dreary winter, and wild-driving snaw,
Alane can delight me—now Nannie's awa.

How does this please you? As to the point of time for the expression, in your proposed print from my "Sodger's Return," it must certainly be at—"She gaz'd." The interesting dubiety and suspense taking possession of her countenance, and the gushing fondness, with a mixture of roguish playfulness in his, strike me as things of which a master will make a great deal. In great haste, but in great truth, yours.

* Clarinda is said to have been the subject of this lyric. Burns composed it for the tune "There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame," or "There's few guid fellows when Jamie's awa'"—see vol. i. page 186; we, however, substitute the universally adopted melody. Thomson set the words to the Irish air "Coolun."

No. LXIX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

January, 1795.

I FEAR for my songs; however a few may please, yet originality is a coy feature in composition, and in a multiplicity of efforts in the same style disappears altogether. For these three thousand years we poetic folks have been describing the spring, for instance; and as the spring continues the same, there must soon be a sameness in the imagery, &c., of these said rhyming folks.

A great critic (Aikin) on songs says that love and wine are the exclusive themes for song-writing. The following is on neither subject, and consequently is no song, but will be allowed, I think, to be two or three pretty good prose thoughts inverted into rhyme:—

FOR A' THAT, AND A' THAT.

Slow.

TUNE—"For a' that, an' a' that."

Is there, for honest po-ver-ty, That hangs his head, and a' that,
The coward slave, we pass him by, We dare be poor for a' that.
CHORUS—For a' that, and a' that, Our toils obscure, and a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp, The man's the gowd for a' that.

What though on hamely fare we dine,

Wear hoddin grey, and a' that;

Gi'e fools their silks, and knaves their wine,

A man's a man for a' that!

For a' that, and a' that,

Their tinsel show, and a' that;

The honest man, though e'er sae poor,

Is king o' men for a' that!

Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,

Wha struts, and stares, and a' that;

Though hundreds worship at his word,

He's but a coof for a' that!

For a' that, and a' that,

His riband, star, and a' that,

The man of independent mind,

He looks and laughs at a' that!

A king can mak' a belted knight,†

A marquis, duke, and a' that;

But an honest man's aboon his might:

Guid faith, he maunna fa' that!

† MS. variation:

A prince can mak' a belted knight.



For a' that, and a' that,
 Their dignities, and a' that,
 The pith o' sense, and pride o' worth,
 Are higher ranks than a' that.
 Then let us pray that come it may—
 As come it will for a' that—
 That sense and worth o'er a' the earth
 May bear the gree, and a' that !
 For a' that, and a' that,
 It's coming yet for a' that,
 That man to man, the world o'er,
 Shall brothers be for a' that !

I do not give you the foregoing song for your book, but merely by way of *vive la bagatelle*; for the piece is not really poetry. How will the following do for "Craigieburn wood?"

VOL. II.

CRAIGIEBURN WOOD.*

VERY SLOW, WITH EXPRESSION.

TUNE—"Craigieburn Wood."

Sweet fa's the eve on Craig-ie-burn, And blythe a-wakes the morrow,
 But a' the pride o' spring's re-turn Can yield me nocht but sor-row.
 I see the flow'rs and spreading trees, I hear the wild birds sing-ing;
 But what a wea-ry wight can please, And care his bo-som wringing?

* Burns sent to Johnson's "Museum" another song similar to the above, with the same title, see vol. i. p. 195.

Fain, fain would I my griefs impart,
 Yet darena for your anger ;
 But secret love will break my heart,
 If I conceal it langer.
 If thou refuse to pity me,
 If thou shalt love anither,
 When you green leaves fade frae the tree,
 Around my grave they 'll wither.

Farewell! God bless you.



No. LXX.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 30th January, 1795.

MY DEAR SIR,

I THANK you heartily for "Nannie's awa'," as well as for "Craigieburn," which I think a very comely pair. Your observation on the difficulty of original writing in a number of efforts in the same style, strikes me very forcibly; and it has again and again excited my wonder to find you continually surmounting this difficulty, in the many delightful songs you have sent me. Your *vive la bagatelle* song, "For a' that," shall undoubtedly be included in my list.



No. LXXI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

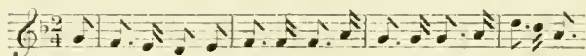
February, 1795.

HERE is another trial at your favourite air:—

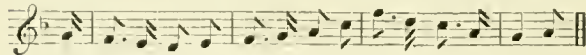
O, LASSIE, ART THOU SLEEPING YET.*

SLOWISH.

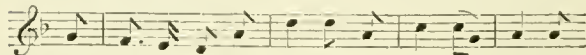
TUNE—"Let me in this ae night."



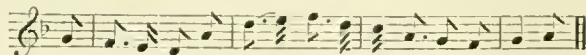
SONG—O las - sie, art thou sleep - ing yet, Or art thou wak - in', I would wit?



For love has bound me hand and foot, And I would fain be in, jo.



CHORUS—O let me in this ae night, This ae, ae, ae night;



For pl - ty's sake this ae night, O rise and let me in, jo!

* A song in Herd's collection supplied the poet with the materials of this lyric. He has altered it for the better.

Thou hear'st the winter wind and weet,
 Nae star blinks through the driving sleet:
 Tak' pity on my weary feet,
 And shield me frae the rain, jo.
 O let me in, &c.

The bitter blast that round me blaws
 Unheeded howls, unheeded fa's;
 The cauldness o' thy heart 's the cause
 Of a' my grief and pain, jo.
 O let me in, &c.

HER ANSWER.

O TELL na me o' wind an' rain,
 Upbraid na me wi' cauld disdain,
 Gae back the gait ye cam' again,
 I winna let ye in, jo.
 I tell you now this ae night,
 This ae, ae, ae night;
 And ance for a' this ae night,
 I winna let ye in, jo.

The snellest blast, at mirkest hours,
 That round the pathless wand'rer pours,
 Is nocht to what poor she endures,
 That 's trusted faithless man, jo.
 I tell you now, &c.

The sweetest flower that deck'd the mead,
 Now trodden like the vilest weed;
 Let simple maid the lesson read,
 The weird may be her ain, jo.
 I tell you now, &c.

The bird that charm'd his summer-day,
 Is now the cruel fowler's prey;
 Let witless, trusting, woman say
 How aft her fate 's the same, jo.
 I tell you now, &c.

I do not know whether it will do.



No. LXXII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

ECCLEFECHAN, 7th February, 1795.

MY DEAR THOMSON,

You cannot have any idea of the predicament in which I write to you. In the course of my duty as

Supervisor (in which capacity I have acted of late), I came yesternight to this unfortunate, wicked, little village.* I have gone forward, but snows of ten feet deep have impeded my progress; I have tried to "gae back the gait I cam' again," but the same obstacle has shut me up within insuperable bars. To add to my misfortune, since dinner a scraper has been torturing catgut, in sounds that would have insulted the dying agonies of a sow under the hands of a butcher, and thinks himself, on that very account, exceeding good company. In fact, I have been in a dilemma, either to get drunk, to forget these miseries; or to hang myself to get rid of them; like a prudent man (a character congenial to my every thought, word, and deed), I, of two evils, have chosen the least, and am—very drunk at your service!

I wrote to you yesterday from Dumfries. I had not time then to tell you all I wanted to say; and, Heaven knows, at present I have not capacity.

Do you know an air—I am sure you must know it—"We'll gang nae mair to yon town?" I think, in slowish time, it would make an excellent song. I am highly delighted with it; and if you should think it worthy of your attention, I have a fair dame in my eye to whom I would consecrate it.

As I am just going to bed, I wish you a good night.



No. LXXIII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

25th February, 1795.

I HAVE to thank you, my dear Sir, for two epistles, one containing "Let me in this ae night;" and the other from Ecclefechan, proving that, drunk or sober, your "mind is never muddy." You have displayed great address in the above song. Her answer is excellent, and at the same time takes away the indelicacy that otherwise would have attached to his entreaties. I like the song as it now stands very much.

I had hopes you would be arrested some days at Ecclefechan, and be obliged to beguile the tedious forenoons by song-making. It will give me pleasure to receive the verses you intend for "O wat ye wha's in yon town?"

* Ecclefechan is a small town in Annandale, where Thomas Carlyle was born, December, 1795. "The bard must have been tipsy indeed," says Currie, who was a native of the neighbourhood, "to abuse sweet Ecclefechan at this rate."

No. LXXIV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.



May, 1795.

ADDRESS TO THE WOOD-LARK.

ANDANTE.

TUNE—"Loch Erroch Side."

O stay, sweet warbling wood-lark, stay, Nor quit for me the trembling spray,

A hap-less lov-er courts thy lay, Thy sooth-ing, fond coin-plaining.

A-gain, a-gain, that ten-der part, That I may catch thy melt-ing art;

For sure-ly that wad touch her heart, Wha kills me wi' dis-dain-ing.

Say, was thy little mate unkind,
And heard thee as the careless wind?
Oh, nocht but love and sorrow join'd,
Sic notes o' woe could wauken.
Thou tells o' never-ending care;
O' speechless grief, and dark despair;
For pity's sake, sweet bird, nae mair!
Or my poor heart is broken!

Let me know, your very first leisure, how you like this song.

ON CHLORIS BEING ILL.†

SLOW,

TUNE—"Ay Waukin, O!"

Can I cease to care? Can I cease to languish? While my darling fair Is

on the couch of anguish? Long, long the night, Heavy comes the

morrow, While my soul's delight Is on her bed of sorrow.

† Jean Lorimer.



Every hope is fled,
Every fear is terror;
Slumber even I dread,
Every dream is horror.
Long, long the night, &c.

Hear me, Pow'rs divine !
Oh, in pity hear me !
Take aught else of mine,
But my Chloris spare me !
Long, long the night, &c.

How do you like the foregoing? The Irish air, "Humours of Glen," is a great favourite of mine, and as, except the silly stuff in the "Poor Soldier," there are not any decent verses for it, I have written for it as follows:—

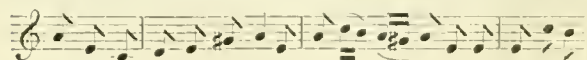
CALEDONIA.

ANDANTINO.

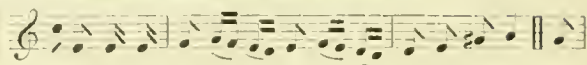
TIME—"The Humours of Glen."



Their groves o' sweet myrtle let foreign lands reckon, Where bright beaming



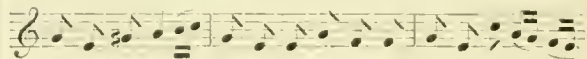
summers ex-alt the perfume. Far dear-er to me you lone glen o' green



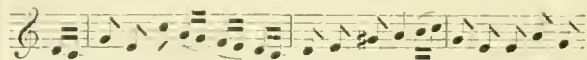
reck-on, Wi' the burn steal-ing nu-der the lang yel-low broom; Far



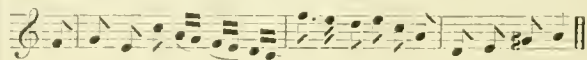
dearer to me are yon humble broom bowers, Where the blue-bell and gowan lurk



low-ly un-seen, For there, light-ly trip-ping a-mang the wild flow-ers,



A - list'ning the lin-net, aft wanders my Jean.* For there, lightly tripping



a-mang the wild flow-ers, A - listening the linnet, aft wanders my Jean.

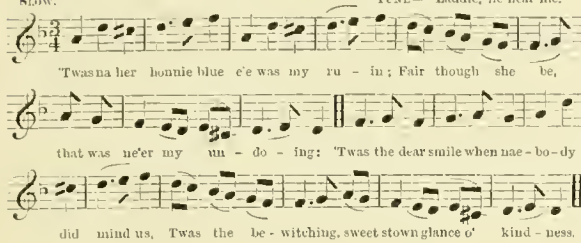
Tho' rich is the breeze in their gay, sunny valleys,
And could Caledonia's blast on the wave :
Their sweet-scented woodlands that skirt the proud palace,
What are they?—The haunt of the tyrant and slave !

* "The heroine of this song was Mrs. Burns, who so charmed the Poet by singing it with taste and feeling, that he declared it to be one of his luckiest lyrics."—CUNNINGHAM,

The slave's spicy forests, and gold-bubbling fountains,
 The brave Caledonian views wth disdain;
 He wanders as free as the winds o' his mountains,
 Save love's willing fetters, the chains o' his Jean.
 He wanders as free, &c.

"TWAS NA HER BONNIE BLUE E'E.

SLOW. TUNE—"Laddie, lie near me."



"Twas na her bonnie blue e'e was my ru - in; Fair though she be,
 that was ne'er my ru - do - ing: 'Twas the dear smile when nae - bo - dy
 did mind us, 'Twas the be - witching, sweet stown glance o' kind - ness.

Sair do I fear that to hope is denied me,
 Sair do I fear that despair maun abide me!
 But tho' fell fortune should fate us to sever,
 Queen shall she be in my bosom for ever.

Mary, I 'm thine wi' a passion sincerest,*
 And thou hast plighted me love o' the dearest!
 And thou 'rt the angel that never can alter,
 Sooner the sun in his motion would falter.

Let me hear from you.



No. LXXV.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

You must not think, my good Sir, that I have any intention to enhance the value of my gift, when I say, in justice to the ingenious and worthy artist, that the design and execution of the "Cottar's Saturday Night" is in my opinion one of the happiest productions of Allan's pencil. I shall be grievously disappointed if you are not quite pleased with it.

The figure intended for your portrait, I think strikingly like you, as far as I can remember your phiz. This should make the piece interesting to your family every way. Tell me whether Mrs. Burns finds you out among the figures.

I cannot express the feeling of admiration with which I have read your pathetic "Address to the Wood-lark," your elegant "Panegyric on Caledonia," and your affecting verses on "Chloris' illness." Every repeated perusal of these gives new delight. The other song to "Laddie, lie near me," though not equal to these, is very pleasing.

* MS. variation:—

"Jeanie, I 'm thine wi' a passion sincerest."

No. LXXVI.

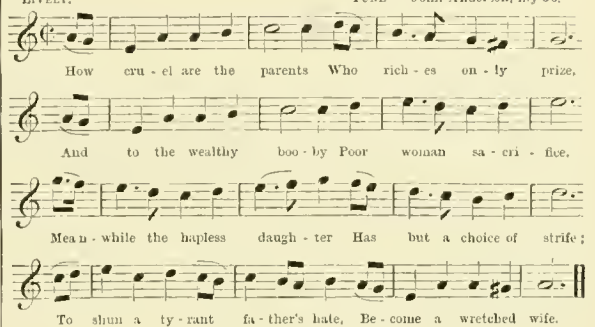
BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.



HOW CRUEL ARE THE PARENTS.

ALTERED FROM AN OLD ENGLISH SONG.

LIVELY. TUNE—"John Anderson, my Jo."



How cru - el are the parents Who rich - es on - ly prize,
 And to the wealthy boo - by Poor woman sa - cri - fice,
 Mean - while the hapless daugh - ter Has but a choice of strife;
 To shun a ty - rant fa - ther's hate, Be - come a wretched wife.

The ravening hawk pursuing,
 The trembling dove thus flies,
 To shun impelling ruin,
 A while her pinions tries;
 Till of escape despairing,
 No shelter or retreat,
 She trusts the ruthless falconer,
 And drops beneath his feet!



MARK YONDER POMP.

ANDANTE. TUNE—"Deil tak' the Wars."



Mark yonder pomp of cost - ly fash - ion Round the wealthy,
 titl - ed bride; But when com - par - ed with real pas - sion,
 Poor is all that price - ly pride. What are the showy treasures? What
 are the noisy pleasures? The gay, gaudy glare of van - i - ty and art: The
 polished jewel's blaze May draw the wond'ring gaze, And courtly grandeur bright
 The fancy may delight, But never, never can come near the heart.

But did you see my dearest Chloris
 In simplicity's array ;
 Lovely as yonder sweet opening flower is,
 Shrinking from the gaze of day !
 O then, the heart alarming,
 And all resistless charming,
 In Love's delightful fetters she chains the willing soul !
 Ambition would disown
 The world's imperial crown,
 Even Avarice would deny
 His worshipp'd deity,
 And feel thro' ev'ry vein Love's raptures roll.

Well ! this is not amiss. You see how I answer your orders : your tailor could not be more punctual. I am just now in a high fit for poetizing, provided that the strait jacket of criticism don't cure me. If you can in a post or two administer a little of the intoxicating potion of your applause, it will raise your humble servant's frenzy to any height you want. I am at this moment "holding high converse" with the Muses, and have not a word to throw away on such a prosaic dog as you are.



No. LXXVII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

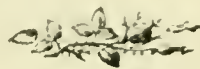
May, 1795.

TEN thousand thanks for your elegant present : though I am ashamed of the value of it being bestowed on a man who has not by any means merited such an instance of kindness. I have shown it to two or three judges of the first abilities here, and they all agree with me in classing it as a first-rate production. My phiz is *sac kenspeckle*, that the very joiner's apprentice whom Mrs. Burns employed to break up the parcel (I was out of town that day) knew it at once. My most grateful compliments to Allan, who has honoured my rustic muse so much with his masterly pencil. One strange coincidence is, that the little one who is making the felonious attempt on the cat's tail, is the most striking likeness of an ill-deedie, d—n'd, wee, rumblegairie urchin of mine, whom, from that propensity to witty wickedness and manfu' mischief which, even at twa days auld, I foresaw would form the striking features of his disposition, I named Willie Nicol, after a certain friend of mine, who is one of the masters of a grammar-school in a city which shall be nameless.*

* "The picture alluded to was painted from the 'Cottar's Saturday Night;' it displays at once the talent and want of taste of the ingenious artist. The scene is a solemn one; but the serenity of the moment is disturbed by what some esteem as a beauty, namely,

Give the inclosed epigram to my much-valued friend Cunningham, and tell him that on Wednesday I go to visit a friend of his, to whom his friendly partiality in speaking of me in a manner introduced me—I mean a well-known military and literary character, Colonel Dirom.

You do not tell me how you liked my two last songs. Are they condemned !



No. LXXVIII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

13th May, 1795.

It gives me great pleasure to find that you are all so well satisfied with Mr. Allan's production. The chance resemblance of your little fellow, whose promising disposition appeared so very early, and suggested whom he should be named after, is curious enough. I am acquainted with that person, who is a prodigy of learning and genius, and a pleasant fellow, though no saint.

You really make me blush when you tell me you have not merited the drawing from me. I do not think I can ever repay you, or sufficiently esteem and respect you, for the liberal and kind manner in which you have entered into the spirit of my undertaking, which could not have been perfected without you. So I beg you would not make a fool of me again by speaking of obligation.

I like your two last songs very much, and am happy to find you are in such a high fit of poetizing. Long may it last ! Clarke has made a fine pathetic air to Mallet's superlative ballad of "William and Margaret," and is to give it to me, to be enrolled among the elect.



No. LXXIX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

IX "Whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad," the iteration of that line is tiresome to my ear. Here goes what I think is an improvement :

the attempt to cut the top of the cat's tail by the little merry urchin seated on the floor. The unity of the sentiment is destroyed ; it jars with the harmony of the rest of the picture as much as a snail does in crawling in the bosom of a new opened rose. This sense of propriety is required in such compositions : Burns was a great master in it ; he introduced true love, domestic gladness, and love of country along with devotion in his noble poem of 'The Cottar's Saturday Night,' but he never dreamed of throwing in any of his ludicrous or humorous touches—all is as much in keeping as in the best conceived picture."—CUNNINGHAM.

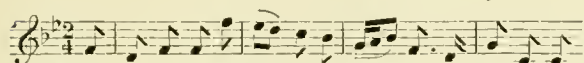
O whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad;
 O whistle, and I'll come to ye, my lad;
 Though father and mother, and a' should gae mad,
 Thy Jeanie will venture wi' ye, my lad.

In fact, a fair dame, at whose shrine I, the Priest of the Nine, offer up the incense of Parnassus—a dame whom the Graces have attired in witchcraft, and whom the Loves have armed with lightning; a fair one, herself the heroine of the song—insists on the amendment; and dispute her commands if you dare!

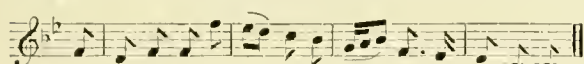
THIS IS NO MY AIN LASSIE.

MODERATO.

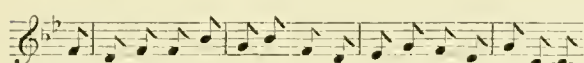
TUNE—"This is no my ain house."



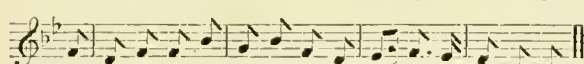
CHORUS—O this is no my ain las-sie, Fair tho' the las-sie be;



O weel ken I my ain las-sie, Kind love is in her e'e.



SONG—I see a form, I see a face, Ye weel may wi' the fairest place:



It wants, to me, the witching grace, The kind love that's in her e'e.

She's bonnie, blooming, straight, and tall,
 And lang has had my heart in thrall;
 And aye it charms my very saul,
 The kind love that's in her e'e.
 O this is no, &c.

A thief sae pawkie is my Jean,
 To steal a blink by a' unseen;
 But gleg as light are lovers' een,
 When kind love is in the e'e.
 O this is no, &c.

It may escape the courtly sparks,
 It may escape the learned clerks;
 But weel the watching lover marks
 The kind love that's in her e'e.
 O this is no, &c.

Do you know that you have roused the torpidity of Clarke at last? He has requested me to write three or four songs for him, which he is to set to music himself. The inclosed sheet contains two songs for him, which please to present to my valued friend Cunningham.

I inclose the sheet open, both for your inspection, and that you may copy the song, "O bonnie was yon rosy

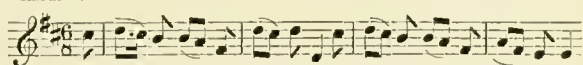
brier." I do not know whether I am right; but that song pleases me, and as it is extremely probable that Clarke's newly roused celestial spark will be soon smothered in the fogs of indolence, if you like the song, it may go as Scottish verses to the air of "I wish my love was in a mire;" and poor Erskine's English lines may follow.

I inclose you a "For a' that, and a' that," which was never in print: it is a much superior song to mine.* I have been told that it was composed by a lady.

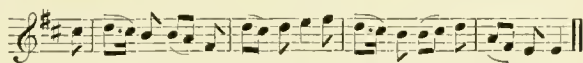
O BONNIE WAS YON ROSY BRIER.

ANDANTE.

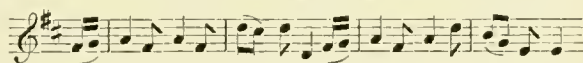
TUNE—"The Wee Wee Man."



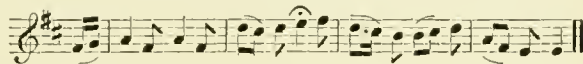
O bon-nie was yon ro-sy brier, That bloom-sae far frae haunt o' man;



And bon-nie she, ah, and how dear! It shad-el frae the e'en-in'sun.



Yon rosebuds in the morn-ing dew, How pure a-mang the leaves sae green;



But pur-er was the lov-er's vow They witness'd in their shade yestreen.

All in its rude and prickly bower,
 That crimson rose how sweet and fair!
 But love is far a sweeter flower,
 Amid life's thorny path o' care.
 The pathless wild, and wimpling burn,
 Wi' Chloris in my arms, be mine;
 And I the world nor wish nor scorn,
 Its joys and griefs alike resign.

Written on the blank leaf of a copy of the last edition of my poems, presented to the lady, whom, in so many fictitious reveries of passion, but with the most ardent sentiments of real friendship, I have so often sung under the name of Chloris:—

TO CHLORIS.

'Tis friendship's pledge, my young, fair friend,
 Nor thou the gift refuse,
 Nor with unwilling ear attend
 The moralizing muse.

[&c. See the poem at length, vol. i. page 220.]

Une bagatelle de l'amitié.—COILA.

* We have no farther account of this piece, except in postscript to Letter LXXX.

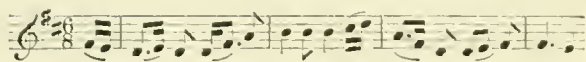


TO MR. CUNNINGHAM.

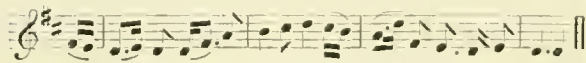
NOW SPRING HAS CLAD THE GROVE IN
GREEN.

Slow.

TUNE—"The Hopeless Lover."



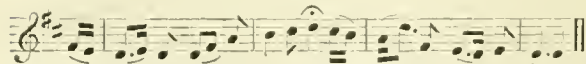
Now spring has clad the grove in green, And strew'd the lea wi' flowers;



The fur-row'd, wav-ing corn is seen Re-joice in fos-ter-ing show'ers;



While il-ka thing in Nature join Their sor-rows to fore-go,



O why thus all a-lone are mine The wea-ry steps of woe?

The trout within yon wimpling burn
Glides swift, a silver dart,

And safe beneath the shady thorn
Defies the angler's art:
My life was once that careless stream,
That wanton trout was I;
But love, wi' unrelenting beam,
Has scor'd my fountains dry.

The little flow'et's peaceful lot,
In yonder cliff that grows—
Which, save the linnet's flight, I wot,
Nae ruder visit knows—
Was mine; till love has o'er me past,
And blighted a' my bloom,
And now beneath the with'ring blast
My youth and joy consume.

The waken'd lav'rock warbling springs,
And climbs the early sky,
Winnowing blythe her dewy wings
In morning's rosy eye:
As little reckt I sorrow's power,
Until the flowery snare
O' witching love, in luckless hour,
Made me the thrall o' care.

O had my fate been Greenland snows,
 Or Afric's burning zone,
 Wi' Man and Nature leagu'd my foes,
 So Peggy ne'er I'd known!
 The wretch whose doom is, "hope nae mair,"
 What tongue his woes can tell!
 Within whose bosom, save despair,
 Nae kinder spirits dwell.



No. LXXX

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

EDINBURGH, 3rd August, 1795.

MY DEAR SIR,

THIS will be delivered to you by a Dr. Brianton, who has read your works, and pants for the honour of your acquaintance. I do not know the gentleman; but his friend, who applied to me for this introduction, being an excellent young man, I have no doubt he is worthy of all acceptance.

My eyes have just been gladdened, and my mind feasted, with your last packet—full of pleasant things indeed. What an imagination is yours! It is superfluous to tell you that I am delighted with all the three songs, as well as with your elegant and tender verses to Chloris.

I am sorry you should be induced to alter, "O whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad," to the prosaic line, "Thy Jeanie will venture wi' ye, my lad." I must be permitted to say, that I do not think the latter either reads or sings so well as the former. I wish, therefore, you would in my name petition the charming Jeanie, whoever she be, to let the line remain unaltered.

I should be happy to see Mr. Clarke produce a few airs to be joined to your verses. Every body regrets his writing so very little, as every body acknowledges his ability to write well. Pray, was the resolution formed coolly before dinner, or was it a midnight vow made over a bowl of punch with the bard?

I shall not fail to give Mr. Cunningham what you have sent him.

P.S.—The lady's "For a' that and a' that," is sensible enough, but no more to be compared to yours than I to Hercules.

VOL. II.

No. LXXXI.

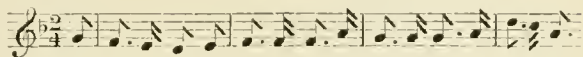
BURNS TO MR THOMSON



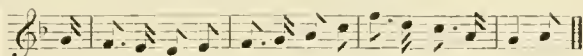
FORLORN, MY LOVE, NO COMFORT NEAR.

SLOWISH,

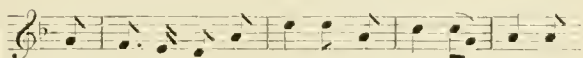
TUNE—"Let me in this ae night."



Song—For-lorn, my Love, no com-fort near, Far, far from thee I wander here;



Far, far from thee, the fate severe At which I must re-pine, Love.



Chorus—O wert thou, Love, but near me; But near, near, near me;



How kind-ly thou wouldst cheer me, And mingle sighs with mine, Love.

Around me scowls a wintry sky,
 That blasts each bud of hope and joy;
 And shelter, shade, nor home have I,
 Save in those arms of thine, Love.
 O wert thou, Love, but near me, &c.

Cold, alter'd friendship's cruel part,
 To poison fortune's ruthless dart—*
 Let me not break thy faithful heart,
 And say that fate is mine, Love.
 O wert thou, Love, but near me, &c.

But dreary tho' the moments fleet,
 O let me think we yet shall meet!
 That only ray of solace sweet
 Can on thy Chloris shine, Love.
 O wert thou, Love, but near me, &c.

How do you like the foregoing? I have written it within this hour; so much for the speed of my Pegasus, but what say you to his bottom?

* In a letter dated August 3, 1795, the Poet sent to Thomson the following alterations to obviate some objections he had made to verse third—

"Cold, alter'd friends, with cruel art,
 Poisoning fell Misfortune's dart;
 Let me not break thy faithful heart,
 And say that fate is mine, Love."



No. LXXXII.

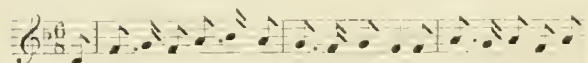
BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.



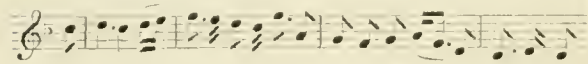
LAST MAY A BRAW WOOER.

MODERATO.

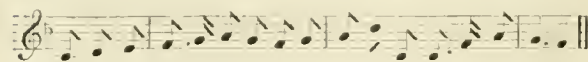
TUNE—"The Lothian Lassic."



Last May a braw woo - er cam' down the lang glen, And sair wi' his love he



did deave me; I said there was naething I hat - ed like men, The deuce gae wi'



him to be - lieve me, believe me, The deuce gae wi' him, to be - lieve me

He spak' o' the darts in my bonnie black een,
 And row'd for my love he was dying;
 I said he might die when he liked, for Jean,
 The Lord forgie me for lying, for lying,
 The Lord forgie me for lying!

A weel-stocked mailen—himself for the laird—
 And marriage aff-hand, were his proffers:
 I never loot on that I kenn'd it, or ear'd,
 But thought I might ha'e waur offers, waur offers,
 But thought I might ha'e waur offers.

But what wad ye think? in a fortnight or less—
 The deil tak' his taste to gae near her!
 He up the lang loan to my black cousin Bess,*
 Guess ye how, the jad! I could bear her, could bear her,
 Guess ye how, the jad! I could bear her.

But a' the niest week as I fretted wi' care,
 I gaed to the tryste o' Dalgarnock,

* "In the original MS. this line runs,

'He up the Gateslack to my black cousin Bess.'

Mr. Thomson objected to this word, as well as to the word *Dalgarnock* in the next verse. Burns replies as follows:—

"Gateslack is the name of a particular place, a kind of passage up among the Lowther hills, on the confines of this county. Dalgarnock is also the name of a romantic spot near the Nith, where are still a ruined church and a burial-ground. However, let the first line run, 'He up the lang loan,' &c.

"It is always a pity to throw out any thing that gives locality to our Poet's verses."—CURRIE.

And wha but my fine fickle lover was there !
 I glower'd as I'd seen a warlock, a warlock,
 I glower'd as I'd seen a warlock.

But owre my left shouther I gae him a blink,
 Lest neebors might say I was saucy ;
 My wooer he caper'd as he'd been in drink,
 And vow'd I was his dear lassie, dear lassie,
 And vow'd I was his dear lassie.

I spier'd for my cousin fu' couthly and sweet,
 Gin she had recover'd her hearin',
 And how her new shoon fit her auld shachl't feet,*
 But, heavens ! how he fell a swearin', a swearin',
 But, heavens ! how he fell a swearin' !

He begged, for gudesake ! I wad be his wife,
 Or else I wad kill him wi' sorrow ;
 So e'en to preserve the poor body in life,
 I think I maun wed him to-morrow, to-morrow,
 I think I maun wed him to-morrow.



FRAGMENT.

CHLORIS.

TUNE—"The Caledonian Hunt's Delight." †

WHY, why tell thy lover,
 Bliss he never must enjoy ?
 Why, why undeeve him,
 And give all his hopes the lie ?
 O why, while fancy, raptur'd, slumbers,
 Chloris, Chloris, all the theme,
 Why, why, wouldst thou, cruel,
 Wake thy lover from his dream ?

Such is the d—d peculiarity of the rhythm of this air,
 that I find it impossible to make another stanza to suit it.

I am at present quite occupied with the charming
 sensations of the tooth-ache, so have not a word to spare.



No. LXXXIII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

3rd June, 1795.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR English verses to "Let me in this ae
 night" are tender and beautiful ; and your ballad to the

* In the original copy of this song, as given in Johnson's "Museum,"
 this line runs thus :—

"And how my auld shoon suited her shauchled feet."

† For music see vol. i. p. 202.

"Lothian lassie" is a master-piece for its humour and
 naïveté. The fragment for the "Caledonian hunt" is
 quite suited to the original measure of the air, and, as it
 plagues you so, the fragment must content it. I would
 rather, as I said before, have had Bacchanalian words, had
 it so pleased the poet ; but nevertheless, for what we
 have received, Lord, make us thankful !



No. LXXXIV.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

5th February, 1796.

O Robby Burns, are ye sleeping yet ?
 Or are ye wauken, I would wit ?

THE pause you have made, my dear Sir, is awful ! ‡ Am
 I never to hear from you again ? I know, and I lament
 how much you have been afflicted of late, but I trust that
 returning health and spirits will now enable you to resume
 the pen, and delight us with your musings. I have still
 about a dozen Scotch and Irish airs that I wish "married
 to immortal verse." We have several true-born Irishmen
 on the Scottish list ; but they are now naturalized, and
 reckoned our own good subjects. Indeed we have none
 better. I believe I before told you that I have been
 much urged by some friends to publish a collection of all
 our favourite airs and songs in octavo, embellished with
 a number of etchings by our ingenious friend Allan ; what
 is your opinion of this ?

‡ "Burns," says Cunningham, with much good feeling and judg-
 ment, "had made a pause in his correspondence from June, 1795, to
 February, 1796 ; and Thomson feeling alarm, as much for the Poet's
 sake as for the 'dozen of Scotch and Irish airs' which he wished
 'wedded to immortal verse,' wrote to make inquiries. Something
 in the tone of the letter, and the circumstance of pressing a sick man
 to write songs, seem to indicate that Thomson did not imagine
 that Burns was in a dangerous state. Nor is this surprising : he
 was wildly gay, or gloomily downcast, by fits and starts. Professor
 Walker, who had an interview with him in the latter end of the year,
 failed to perceive in his fierce tone of conversation, and the almost
 convulsive resolution to abide by the wine, the presence of that two-
 fold sickness of mind and body which was soon to carry him to the
 grave. He was, nevertheless, to use the words of a Scottish song,

'Fading in his place ;'

and his wearing away was observed by all who took any interest in his
 fortunes."

No. LXXXV.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

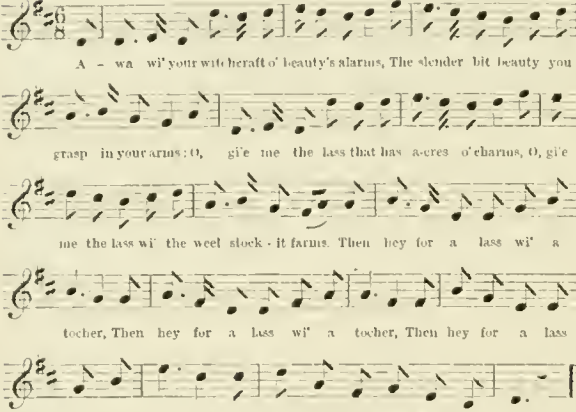
February, 1796.

MANY thanks, my dear Sir, for your handsome, elegant present to Mrs. Burns, and for my remaining volume of P. Pindar. Peter is a delightful fellow, and a first favourite of mine. I am much pleased with your idea of publishing a collection of our songs in octavo with etchings. I am extremely willing to lend every assistance in my power. The Irish airs I shall cheerfully undertake the task of finding verses for.

I have already, you know, equipt three with words, and the other day I strung up a kind of rhapsody to another Hibernian melody, which I admire much.

HEY FOR A LASS WI' A TOCHER.

Tune—"Ballinamona Oira."



A - wa wi' your wite heraffo' beauty's salarins, The slender bit beauty you
grasp in your arms; O, gi'e me the lass that has a-cres o' charins, O, gi'e
me the lass wi' the weel stock - it farms. Then hey for a lass wi' a
tocher, Then hey for a lass wi' a tocher, Then hey for a lass
wi' a tocher, The nice yel-low guineas for me,

Your beauty 's a flower, in the morning that blows,
And withers the faster, the faster it grows;
But the rapturous charm o' the bonnie green knowes,
Ilk spring they 're new deckit wi' bonnie white yowes.
Then hey for a lass wi' a tocher, &c.

And e'en when this beauty your bosom has blest,
The brightest o' beauty may cloy when possest;
But the sweet yellow darlings wi' Geordie imprest,
The langer ye ha'e them—the mair they 're caressit.
Then hey for a lass wi' a tocher, &c.

If this will do, you have now four of my Irish engagement. In my by-past songs I dislike one thing, the name Chloris—I meant it as a fictitious name of a certain lady; but, on second thoughts, it is a high incongruity to have a

Greek appellation to a Scottish pastoral! Alas. Of this and something else in my next: I have no amendments to propose. What you once mentioned of "flaxen locks" is just; they cannot enter into an elegant description of beauty. Of this also again. God bless you!



No. LXXXVI.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

YOUR "Hey for a lass wi' a tocher" is a most excellent song, and with you the subject is something new indeed. It is the first time that I have seen you debasing the god of soft desire into an amateur of acres and guineas.

I am happy to find you approve of my proposed octavo edition. Allan has designed and etched about twenty plates, and I am to have my choice of them for that work. Independently of the Hogarthian humour with which they abound, they exhibit the character and costume of the Scottish peasantry with inimitable felicity. In this respect, he himself says, they will far exceed the aquatinta plates he did for the Gentle Shepherd, because in the etching he sees clearly what he is doing, but not so with the aquatinta, which he could not manage to his mind.

The Dutch boors of Ostade are scarcely more characteristic and natural than the Scottish figures in those etchings.



No. LXXXVII.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

April, 1796.

ALAS, my dear Thomson, I fear it will be some time ere I tune my lyre again! "By Babel streams I have sat and wept," almost ever since I wrote you last; I have only known existence by the pressure of the heavy hand of sickness, and have counted time by the repercussions of pain! Rheumatism, cold, and fever have formed to me a terrible combination. I close my eyes in misery, and open them without hope. I look on the vernal day, and say, with poor Fergusson—

"Say wherefore has an all-indulgent Heaven
Light to the comfortless and wretched given?"

This will be delivered to you by a Mrs. Hyslop, landlady of the Globe Tavern here, which for these many

years has been my howff, and where our friend Clarke and I have had many a merry squeeze. I am highly delighted with Mr. Allan's etchings. "Woo'd and married an' a" is admirable. The grouping is beyond all praise. The expression of the figures, conformable to the story in the ballad, is absolutely faultless perfection. I next admire "Turnimspike." What I like least is "Jenny said to Jocky." Besides the female being in her appearance . . . if you take her stooping into the account, she is at least two inches taller than her lover. Poor Cleg-horn! I sincerely sympathize with him! Happy am I to think that he yet has a well-grounded hope of health and enjoyment in this world. As for me—but that is a damn'd subject!



No. LXXXVIII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

4th May, 1796.

I NEED not tell you, my good Sir, what concern the receipt of your last gave me, and how much I sympathize in your sufferings. But do not, I beseech you, give yourself up to despondency, nor speak the language of despair. The vigour of your constitution, I trust, will soon set you on your feet again; and then it is to be hoped you will see the wisdom and the necessity of taking due care of a life so valuable to your family, to your friends, and to the world.

Trusting that your next will bring agreeable accounts of your convalescence and returning good spirits, I remain, with sincere regard, yours.

P. S.—Mrs. Hyslop, I doubt not, delivered the gold seal to you in good condition.*



No. LXXXIX.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

MY DEAR SIR,

I ONCE mentioned to you an air which I have long admired—"Here 's a health to them that 's awa,

* On this gold seal the Poet caused his coat of arms to be engraven:—viz., a small bush; a bird singing; the legend "woodnotes wild," with the motto "better ha'e a wee bush than nae bield."

hinny," but I forget if you took any notice of it. I have just been trying to suit it with verses; and I beg leave to recommend the air to your attention once more. I have only begun it.

JESSY.†

MODERATO.

TUNE—"Here's a Health to Him that's Awa!"

CHORUS—Here's a health to ane I loe dear, Here's a health to ane I loe dear.

Thou art sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet, And soft as their part - ing tear; Jessy. Although thou maun never be mine, Although ev - en hope is de - nied; 'Tis sweet - er for thee de - spair - ing, Than ought in the world be - side, Jessy.

I mourn thro' the gay, gaudy day,
As, hopeless, I muse on thy charms;
But welcome the dream o' sweet slumber,
For then I am lockt in thy arms, Jessy!
Here 's a health to ane I lo'e dear, &c.

I guess by the dear angel smile,
I guess by the love-rolling e'e;
But why urge the tender confession
'Gainst fortune's fell, cruel decree, Jessy?
Here 's a health to ane I lo'e dear, &c.‡



No. XC.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

THIS will be delivered by a Mr. Lewars,§ a young fellow of uncommon merit. As he will be a day or two in town, you will have leisure, if you choose, to write me by him: and if you have a spare half hour to spend with him, I shall place your kindness to my account. I have no copies

† Miss Jessy Lewars, afterwards Mrs. James Thomson, Dumfries.

‡ "In the letter to Mr. Thomson, the three first stanzas only are given, and Mr. Thomson supposed our poet had never gone farther. Among his MSS. was, however, found the fourth stanza, which completes this exquisite song, the last finished offspring of his muse."—CURRIE.

§ Mr. Lewars was brother to Jessy, the subject of the above song.

of the songs I have sent you, and I have taken a fancy to review them all, and possibly may mend some of them: so when you have complete leisure, I will thank you for either the originals or copies.* I had rather be the author of five well-written songs, than of ten otherwise. I have great hopes that the genial influence of the approaching summer will set me to rights, but as yet I cannot boast of returning health. I have now reason to believe that my complaint is a flying gout: a sad business!

Do let me know how Cleghorn is, and remember me to him.

This should have been delivered to you a month ago. I am still very poorly, but should like much to hear from you.



No. XCI.

BURNS TO MR. THOMSON.

BROW, ON THE SOLWAY-FRITH,†
12th July, 1796.

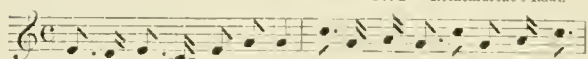
AFTER all my boasted independence, curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel bitch of a haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process, and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake, send me that sum, and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness, but the horrors of a jail have made me half distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously; for, upon returning health, I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds worth of the neatest song-genius you have seen. I tried my hand on "Rothemurche" this morning. The measure is so difficult that it is impossible to infuse much genius into the lines; they are on the other side. Forgive, forgive me!



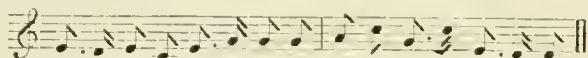
FAIREST MAID ON DEVON BANKS.‡

MODERATO.

TUNE—"Rothemurche's Rant."



CHORUS—Fairest maid on De-von banks, Crystal Der-on, wind-ing Dev-on,



Wilt thou lay that frown a-side, And smile as thou were wont to do?



SONG—Full well thou know'st I love thee dear! Could'st thou to malice lend an ear?



O, did not love exclaim, "Forbear, Nor use a faith-fal lov-er so."

* "It is needless to say that this revival Burns did not live to perform."—CURRIE.

† See LIFE.

‡ Charlotte Hamilton. See LIFE.

Then come, thou fairest of the fair,
Those wanton smiles, O let me share;
And, by thy beauteous self I swear,
No love but thine my heart shall know.
Fairest maid on Devon banks, &c. §



No. XCII.

MR. THOMSON TO BURNS.

14th July, 1796.

MY DEAR SIR,

EVER since I received your melancholy letter by Mrs. Hyslop, I have been ruminating in what manner I could endeavour to alleviate your sufferings. Again and again I thought of a pecuniary offer, but the recollection of one of your letters on this subject, and the fear of offending your independent spirit, checked my resolution. I thank you heartily therefore for the frankness of your letter of the 12th, and with great pleasure inclose a draft for the very sum I proposed sending. Would I were Chancellor of the Exchequer but for one day, for your sake!

Pray, my good Sir, is it not possible for you to muster a volume of poetry? If too much trouble to you in the present state of your health, some literary friend might be found here, who would select and arrange from your manuscripts, and take upon him the task of Editor. In the mean time, it could be advertised to be published by subscription. Do not shun this mode of obtaining the value of your labour: remember Pope published the *Iliad* by subscription. Think of this, my dear Burns, and do not reckon me intrusive with my advice. You are too well convinced of the respect and friendship I bear you to impute any thing I say to an unworthy motive. Yours faithfully.

The verses to "Rothemurche" will answer finely. I am happy to see you can still tune your lyre.

§ "These verses, and the letter inclosing them, are written in a character that marks the very feeble state of Burns' bodily strength. Mr. Syme is of opinion that he could not have been in any danger of a jail at Dumfries, where certainly he had many firm friends, nor under any such necessity of imploring aid from Edinburgh. But about this time his reason began to be at times unsettled, and the horrors of a jail perpetually haunted his imagination. He died on the 21st of this month."—CURRIE.

Allan Cunningham, on the contrary, asserts that, not only was Burns really in poverty, but, in the opening of 1796, his family were all but wanting bread. "Those who say he had good friends around him, seem not to know that he had a soul too proud to solicit help, and to forget that there are hearts in the world ready to burst before they beg."

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE.

No. I.

TO ELLISON, OR ALISON BEGBIE.*

LOCHLEA, 1780.

I VERILY believe, my dear E., that the pure genuine feelings of love are as rare in the world as the pure genuine principles of virtue and piety. This, I hope, will account for the uncommon style of all my letters to you. By uncommon I mean their being written in such a serious manner, which, to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister. I don't know how it is, my dear; for though, except your company, there is nothing on earth gives me so much pleasure as writing to you, yet it never gives me those giddy raptures so much talked of among lovers. I have often thought, that if a well-grounded affection be not really a part of virtue, 'tis something extremely akin to it. Whenever the thought of my E. warms my heart, every feeling of humanity, every principle of generosity, kindles in my breast. It extinguishes every dirty spark of malice and envy which are but too apt to infest me. I grasp every creature in the arms of universal benevolence, and equally participate in the pleasures of the happy, and sympathize with the miseries of the unfortunate. I assure you, my dear, I often look up to the Divine Disposer of events with an eye of gratitude for the blessing which I hope he intends to bestow on me in bestowing you. I sincerely wish that he may bless my endeavours to make your life as comfortable and happy as possible, both in sweetening the rougher parts of my natural temper, and bettering the unkindly circumstances of my fortune. This, my dear, is a passion, at least in my view, worthy of a man, and I will add worthy of a Christian. The sordid

* See LIFE.

earth-worm may profess love to a woman's person, whilst in reality his affection is centered in her pocket; and the slavish drudge may go a-wooing as he goes to the horse-market, to choose one who is stout and firm, and, as we may say of an old horse, one who will be a good drudge and draw kindly. I disdain their dirty, puny ideas. I would be heartily out of humour with myself, if I thought I were capable of having so poor a notion of the sex which were designed to crown the pleasures of society. Poor devils! I don't envy them their happiness who have such notions. For my part, I propose quite other pleasures with my dear partner.—R. B.



No. II.

TO THE SAME.

LOCHLEA, 1780.

MY DEAR E.,

I do not remember, in the course of your acquaintance and mine, ever to have heard your opinion on the ordinary way of falling in love amongst people of our station of life: I do not mean the persons who proceed in the way of bargain, but those whose affection is really placed on the person.

Though I be, as you know very well, but a very awkward lover myself, yet as I have some opportunities of observing the conduct of others who are much better skilled in the affair of courtship than I am, I often think it is owing to lucky chance more than to good management that there are not more unhappy marriages than usually are.

It is natural for a young fellow to like the acquaintance of the females, and customary for him to keep their company when occasion serves. Some one of them is more agreeable to him than the rest; there is something, he knows not what, pleases him, he knows not how, in her company. This I take to be what is called love with the greatest part of us; and I must own, my dear E., it is a hard game such a one as you have to play, when you meet with such a lover. You cannot admit but he is sincere; and yet though you use him ever so favourably, perhaps in a few months, or at farthest a year or two, the same unaccountable fancy may make him as distractedly fond of another, whilst you are quite forgot. I am aware that perhaps the next time I have the pleasure of seeing you, you may bid me take my own lesson home, and tell me that the passion I have professed for you is perhaps one of those transient flashes I have been describing; but I hope, my dear E., you will do me the justice to believe me, when I assure you that the love I have for you is founded on the sacred principles of virtue and honour; and by consequence, so long as you continue possessed of those amiable qualities which first inspired my passion for you, so long must I continue to love you. Believe me, my dear, it is love like this alone which can render the married state happy. People may talk of flames and raptures as long as they please, and a warm fancy, with a flow of youthful spirits, may make them feel something like what they describe; but sure I am the nobler faculties of the mind, with kindred feelings of the heart, can only be the foundation of friendship, and it has always been my opinion that the married life is only friendship in a more exalted degree. If you will be so good as to grant my wishes, and it should please Providence to spare us to the latest periods of life, I can look forward and see that even then, though bent down with wrinkled age—even then, when all other worldly circumstances will be indifferent to me—I will regard my E. with the tenderest affection; and for this plain reason, because she is still possessed of those noble qualities, improved to a much higher degree, which first inspired my affection for her.

“O happy state, when souls each other draw,
Where love is liberty, and nature law!”

I know were I to speak in such a style to many a girl, who thinks herself possessed of no small share of sense, she would think it ridiculous; but the language of the heart is, my dear E., the only courtship I shall ever use to you.

When I look over what I have written, I am sensible it is vastly different from the ordinary style of courtship, but I shall make no apology. I know your good nature will excuse what your good sense may see amiss.

R. B.

No. III.

TO THE SAME.

LOCHLEA, 1781.

MY DEAR E.,

I HAVE often thought it a peculiarly unlucky circumstance in love, that though in every other situation in life telling the truth is not only the safest, but actually by far the easiest way of proceeding, a lover is never under greater difficulty in acting, or more puzzled for expression, than when his passion is sincere and his intentions are honourable. I do not think that it is very difficult for a person of ordinary capacity to talk of love and fondness which are not felt, and to make vows of constancy and fidelity which are never intended to be performed, if he be villain enough to practise such detestable conduct: but to a man whose heart glows with the principles of integrity and truth, and who sincerely loves a woman of amiable person, uncommon refinement of sentiment, and purity of manners—to such a one, in such circumstances, I can assure you, my dear, from my own feelings at this present moment, courtship is a task indeed. There is such a number of foreboding fears and distrustful anxieties crowd into my mind when I am in your company, or when I sit down to write to you, that what to speak or what to write I am altogether at a loss.

There is one rule which I have hitherto practised, and which I shall invariably keep with you, and that is, honestly to tell you the plain truth. There is something so mean and unmanly in the arts of dissimulation and falsehood, that I am surprised they can be used by any one in so noble, so generous a passion, as virtuous love. No, my dear E., I shall never endeavour to gain your favour by such detestable practices. If you will be so good and so generous as to admit me for your partner, your companion, your bosom friend through life, there is nothing on this side of eternity shall give me greater transport; but I shall never think of purchasing your hand by any arts unworthy of a man, and I will add, of a Christian. There is one thing, my dear, which I earnestly request of you, and it is this; that you would soon either put an end to my hopes by a peremptory refusal, or cure me of my fears by a generous consent.

It would oblige me much if you would send me a line or two when convenient. I shall only add further, that if a behaviour regulated (though perhaps but very imperfectly) by the rules of honour and virtue, if a heart devoted to love and esteem you, and an earnest endeavour to promote your happiness—if these are qualities you would wish in a friend, in a husband, I hope you shall ever find them in your real friend and sincere lover,

R. B.

No. IV.

TO THE SAME.

LOCHLEA, 1781.

I OUGHT, in good manners, to have acknowledged the receipt of your letter before this time; but my heart was so shocked with the contents of it, that I can scarcely yet collect my thoughts so as to write to you on the subject. I will not attempt to describe what I felt on receiving your letter. I read it over and over, again and again, and though it was in the politest language of refusal, still it was peremptory; "you were very sorry you could not make me a return, but you wish me"—what without you I never can obtain—"you wish me all kind of happiness." It would be weak and unmanly to say that without you I never can be happy; but sure I am, that sharing life with you would have given it a relish that, wanting you, I never can taste.

Your uncommon personal advantages, and your superior good sense, do not so much strike me. These, possibly, in a few instances may be met with in others; but that amiable goodness, that tender feminine softness, that endearing sweetness of disposition, with all the charming offspring of a warm feeling heart—these I never again expect to meet with in such a degree in this world. All these charming qualities, heightened by an education much beyond anything I have ever met with in any woman I ever dared to approach, have made an impression on my heart that I do not think the world can ever efface. My imagination had fondly flattered itself with a wish, I dare not say it ever reached a hope, that possibly I might one day call you mine. I had formed the most delightful images, and my fancy fondly brooded over them; but now I am wretched for the loss of what I really had no right to expect. I must now think no more of you as a mistress; still I presume to ask to be admitted as a friend. As such I wish to be allowed to wait on you, and as I expect to remove in a few days a little further off, and you, I suppose, will perhaps soon leave this place, I wish to see you or hear from you soon; and if an expression should perhaps escape me, rather too warm for friendship, I hope you will pardon it in, my dear Miss — (pardon me the dear expression for once).* . . .

R. B.

* Lockhart expresses a favourable opinion of these letters to Alison Begbie. Motherwell remarks that "Burns in these letters moralizes occasionally very happily on love and marriage. They are in fact the only sensible love letters we have seen; yet they have an air of task-work and constraint about them that is far from natural."

Dr. Hately Waddell's opinion of them is thus briefly expressed:—"After such sermonizing, the result was by no means wonderful."

Vol. II.

No. V.

TO HIS FATHER.†

IRVINE, December 27, 1781.

HONOURED SIR,

I HAVE purposely delayed writing, in the hope that I should have the pleasure of seeing you on New-Year's day; but work comes so hard upon us, that I do not choose to be absent on that account, as well as for some other little reasons, which I shall tell you at meeting. My health is nearly the same as when you were here, only my sleep is a little sounder, and on the whole I am rather better than otherwise, though I mend by very slow degrees. The weakness of my nerves has so debilitated my mind, that I dare neither review my past wants, nor look forward into futurity; for the least anxiety in my breast produces most unhappy effects on my whole frame. Sometimes, indeed, when for an hour or two my spirits are a little lightened, I glimmer a little into futurity; but my principal, and indeed my only pleasurable, employment is looking backwards and forwards in a moral and religious way. I am quite transported at the thought that ere long, perhaps very soon, I shall bid an eternal adieu to all the pains, and uneasiness, and disquietudes of this weary life: for I assure you I am heartily tired of it, and if I do not very much deceive myself, I could contentedly and gladly resign it.

"The soul, uneasy, and confined at home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come." ‡

It is for this reason I am more pleased with the 15th, 16th, and 17th verses of the 7th chapter of Revelation, than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible, and would not exchange the noble enthusiasm with which they inspire me for all that this world has to offer. As for this world, I despair of ever making a figure in it. I am not formed for the bustle of the busy, nor the flutter of the gay. I shall never again be capable of entering into such scenes. Indeed, I am altogether unconcerned at the thoughts of this life. I foresee that poverty and obscurity probably await me, and I am in some measure prepared, and daily preparing, to meet them. I have but just time and paper to return you my grateful thanks for the lessons of virtue and piety you have given me, which were too much neglected at the time of giving them, but which I hope have been remembered ere it was too late. Present my dutiful respects to my mother, and my compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Muir; and with

† See LIFE.

‡ "Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never is, but always to be, blest;
The soul, uneasy, and confined at home,
Rests and expatiates in a world to come." — POPE.

wishing you a merry New-Year's day, I shall conclude. I am, honoured Sir, your dutiful son,

ROBERT BURNES.

P. S.—My meal is nearly out, but I am going to borrow till I get more.



No. VI.

TO MR. JOHN MURDOCH, SCHOOLMASTER,

STAPLES INN BUILDINGS, LONDON.*

LOCHLEA, 15th January, 1783.

DEAR SIR,

As I have an opportunity of sending you a letter without putting you to that expense which any production of mine would ill repay, I embrace it with pleasure, to tell you that I have not forgotten, nor will ever forget, the many obligations I lie under to your kindness and friendship.

I do not doubt, Sir, but you will wish to know what has been the result of all the pains of an indulgent father and a masterly teacher; and I wish I could gratify your curiosity with such a recital as you would be pleased with: but that is what I am afraid will not be the case. I have, indeed, kept pretty clear of vicious habits, and in this respect, I hope, my conduct will not disgrace the education I have gotten; but as a man of the world I am most miserably deficient. One would have thought that, bred as I have been under a father who has figured pretty well as *un homme des affaires*, I might have been what the world calls a pushing, active fellow; but to tell you the truth, Sir, there is hardly any thing more my reverse. I seem to be one sent into the world to see and observe; and I very easily compound with the knave who tricks me of my money, if there be any thing original about him, which shows me human nature in a different light from any thing I have seen before. In short, the joy of my heart is to "study men, their manners, and their ways;" and for this darling subject I cheerfully sacrifice every other consideration. I am quite indolent about those great concerns that set the bustling, busy sons of care agog; and if I have to answer for the present hour, I am very easy with regard to any thing further. Even the last, worst shift of the unfortunate and the wretched does not much terrify me: I know that even then my talent for what country folks call "a sensible crack," when once it is sanctified by a hoary head, would procure me so much

Mr. John Murdoch (see LIFE) was the Poet's early teacher. He died in London, where he had been long resident, in 1824.

esteem, that even then I would learn to be happy.† However, I am under no apprehensions about that; for though indolent, yet so far as an extremely delicate constitution permits, I am not lazy, and in many things, especially in tavern matters, I am a strict economist. Not, indeed, for the sake of the money; but one of the principal parts in my composition is a kind of pride of stomach, and I scorn to fear the face of any man living: above every thing, I abhor as hell the idea of sneaking in a corner to avoid a dun—possibly some pitiful, sordid wretch, who in my heart I despise and detest. 'Tis this, and this alone, that endears economy to me. In the matter of books, indeed, I am very profuse. My favourite authors are of the sentimental kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his "Elegies;" Thomson; "Man of Feeling"—a book I prize next to the Bible; "Man of the World;" Sterne, especially his "Sentimental Journey;" Macpherson's "Ossian," &c. These are the glorious models after which I endeavour to form my conduct, and 'tis incongruous, 'tis absurd, to suppose that the man whose mind glows with sentiments lighted up at their sacred flame—the man whose heart distends with benevolence to the whole human race—he "who can soar above this little scene of things"—can he descend to mind the paltry concerns about which the terrae-filial race fret, and fume, and vex themselves! O how the glorious triumph swells my heart! I forget that I am a poor insignificant devil, unnoticed and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets, when I happen to be in them, reading a page or two of mankind, and "catching the manners living as they rise," whilst the men of business jostle me on every side, as an idle incumbrance in their way. But I dare say I have by this time tired your patience; so I shall conclude with begging you to give Mrs. Murdoch, not my compliments—for that is a mere common-place story—but my warmest, kindest wishes for her welfare; and accept of the same for yourself from,

Dear Sir, yours.—R. B.



No. VII.

TO MR. JAMES BURNES, WRITER,

MONTROSE‡

LOCHLEA, 21st June, 1783.

DEAR SIR,

MY father received your favour of the 10th current, and as he has been for some months very poorly in health,

† "The last shift alluded to here must be the condition of an itinerant beggar"—CURRIE.

"The last o't, the warst o't,
Is only but to beg."

See Stanza III. "Epistle to David."

‡ See LIFE.

and is in his own opinion (and, indeed, in almost every body's else) in a dying condition, he has only, with great difficulty, wrote a few farewell lines to each of his brothers-in-law. For this melancholy reason I now hold the pen for him to thank you for your kind letter, and to assure you, Sir, that it shall not be my fault if my father's correspondence in the north die with him. My brother writes to John Caird,* and to him I must refer you for the news of our family.

I shall only trouble you with a few particulars relative to the present wretched state of this country. Our markets are exceedingly high; oatmeal, 17*d.* and 18*d.* per peck, and not to be got even at that price. We have indeed been pretty well supplied with quantities of white pease from England and elsewhere; but that resource is likely to fail us, and what will become of us then, particularly the very poorest sort, Heaven only knows. This country, till of late, was flourishing incredibly in the manufacture of silk, lawn, and carpet-weaving; and we are still carrying on a good deal in that way, but much reduced from what it was. We had also a fine trade in the shoe way, but now entirely ruined, and hundreds driven to a starving condition on account of it. Farming is also at a very low ebb with us. Our lands, generally speaking, are mountainous and barren; and our landholders, full of ideas of farming gathered from English, and the Lothians, and other rich soils in Scotland, make no allowance for the odds of the quality of land, and consequently stretch us much beyond what in the event we will be found able to pay. We are also much at a loss for want of proper methods in our improvements of farming. Necessity compels us to leave our old schemes, and few of us have opportunities of being well informed in new ones. In short, my dear Sir, since the unfortunate beginning of this American war, and its as unfortunate conclusion, this country has been, and still is, decaying very fast. Even in higher life, a couple of our Ayrshire noblemen and the major part of our knights and squires are all insolvent. A miserable job of a Douglas, Heron, and Co.'s bank, which no doubt you have heard of, has undone numbers of them; and imitating English and French, and other foreign luxuries and fopperies, has ruined as many more. There is a great trade of smuggling carried on along our coasts, which, however destructive to the interests of the kingdom at large, certainly enriches this corner of it, but too often at the expense of our morals. However, it enables individuals to make, at least for a time, a splendid appearance; but Fortune, as is usual with her when she is uncommonly lavish of her favours, is generally even with them at the last; and happy were it for numbers of them if she would leave them no worse than when she found them.

My mother sends you a small present of a cheese; 'tis

but a very little one, as our last year's stock is sold off; but if you could fix on any correspondent in Edinburgh or Glasgow, we would send you a proper one in the season. Mrs. Black promises to take the cheese under her care so far, and then to send it to you by the Stirling carrier.

I shall conclude this long letter with assuring you that I shall be very happy to hear from you, or any of our friends in your country, when opportunity serves.

My father sends you, probably for the last time in this world, his warmest wishes for your welfare and happiness; and mother and the rest of the family desire to inclose their kind compliments to you, Mrs. Burness, and the rest of your family, along with,

Dear Sir,

Your Affectionate Cousin—R. B.



No. VIII.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS, MONTROSE.

LOCHLEA, 17th February, 1784.†

DEAR COUSIN,

I WOULD have returned you my thanks for your kind favour of the 13th of December sooner, had it not been that I waited to give you an account of that melancholy event, which for some time past we have from day to day expected.

On the 13th current I lost the best of fathers. Though, to be sure, we have had long warning of the impending stroke, still the feelings of nature claim their part; and I cannot recollect the tender endearments and parental lessons of the best of friends and the ablest of instructors, without feeling what perhaps the calmer dictates of reason would partly condemn.

I hope my father's friends in your country will not let their connection in this place die with him. For my part I shall ever with pleasure, with pride, acknowledge my connection with those who were allied by the ties of blood and friendship to a man whose memory I shall ever honour and revere.

I expect, therefore, my dear Sir, you will not neglect any opportunity of letting me hear from you, which will very much oblige,

My dear Cousin, yours sincerely,

R. B.

* The husband of a sister of the Poet's father.

† The family did not leave Lochlea for Mossiel till March, 1784.

No. IX.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESS, MONTROSE.

MOSSGIEL, August 3, 1784.

MY DEAR SIR,

I OUGHT in gratitude to have acknowledged the receipt of your last kind letter before this time; but, without troubling you with any apology, I shall proceed to inform you that our family are all in good health at present, and we were very happy with the unexpected favour of John Caird's company for nearly two weeks, and I must say it of him that he is one of the most agreeable, facetious, warm-hearted lads I was ever acquainted with.

We have been surprised with one of the most extraordinary phenomena in the moral world which, I dare say, has happened in the course of this last century. We have had a party of the Presbytery Relief, as they call themselves, for some time in this country. A pretty thriving society of them has been in the burgh of Irvine for some years past, till about two years ago a Mrs. Buchan from Glasgow came and began to spread some fanatical notions of religion among them, and in a short time made many converts among them; and among others their preacher, one Mr. Whyte, who upon that account has been suspended and formally deposed by his brethren.* He continued, however, to preach in private to his party, and was supported, both he and their spiritual mother, as they affect to call old Buchan, by the contributions of the rest, several of whom were in good circumstances, till in spring last the populace rose and mobbed the old leader, Buchan, and put her out of the town; on which all her followers voluntarily quitted the place likewise, and with such precipitation that many of them never shut their doors behind them. One left a washing on the green, another a cow bellowing at the crib without meat, or any body to mind her, and after several stages, they are fixed at present in the neighbourhood of Dumfries. Their tenets are a strange jumble of enthusiastic jargon; among others, she pretends to give them the Holy Ghost by breathing on them, which she does with postures and practices that are scandalously indecent. They have likewise disposed of all their effects, and hold a community of goods, and live nearly an idle life, carrying on a great farce of pretended devotion in barns and woods, where they lodge and lie all together, and hold likewise a community of women, as it is another of their tenets that they can commit no moral sin. I am

* Accounts of the Buchanites, and of Mrs. Buchan, or "Lucky Buchan," the Joanna Southcott of Scotland: will be found in Chambers' "Lives of Illustrious Scotchmen"—article Buchan: and in McPhail's *Edinburgh Magazine* for 1847.

personally acquainted with most of them, and I can assure you the above mentioned are facts.

This, my dear Sir, is one of the many instances of the folly of leaving the guidance of sound reason and common sense in matters of religion. Whenever we neglect or despise these sacred monitors, the whimsical notions of a perturbed brain are taken for the immediate influences of the Deity, and the wildest fanaticism, and the most inconsistent absurdities, will meet with abettors and converts. Nay, I have often thought that the more out-of-the-way and ridiculous their fancies are, if once they are sanctified under the sacred name of religion, the unhappy mistaken votaries are the more firmly glued to them.

I expect to hear from you soon, and I beg you will remember me to all friends, and believe me to be, my dear Sir, your affectionate Cousin,

ROBERT BURNESS.

Direct to me at Mossiel, parish of Mauchline, near Kilmarnock.



No. X.

TO MR. THOMAS ORR, PARK, NEAR KIRKOSWALD.

MOSSGAVIL, 11th November, 1784.

DEAR THOMAS,

I AM much obliged to you for your last letter, tho' I assure you the contents of it gave me no manner of concern. I am presently so cursedly taken in with an affair of gallantry, that I am very glad Peggy is off my hand, as I am at present embarrassed enough without her. I don't choose to enter into particulars in writing, but never was a poor rakish rascal in a more pitiful taking. I should be glad to see you to tell you the affair; meanwhile I am, your friend,

ROBERT BURNESS.



No. XI.

TO MR. ROBERT RIDDEL.

MY DEAR SIR,

ON rummaging over some old papers I lighted on a MS. of my early years, in which I had determined to write myself out; as I was placed by fortune among a class of men to whom my ideas would have been nonsense.

I had meant that the book should have lain by me, in the fond hope, that some time or other, even after I was no more, my thoughts would fall into the hands of somebody capable of appreciating their value. It sets off thus :—

OBSERVATIONS, HINTS, SONGS, SCRAPS OF POETRY, &c., BY ROBERT BURNES; a man who had little art in making money, and still less in keeping it, but was, however, a man of some sense, a great deal of honesty, and unbounded good-will to every creature rational or irrational. As he was but little indebted to scholastic education, and bred at a plough-tail, his performances must be strongly tinged with his unpolished, rustic way of life; but as I believe they are really his own, it may be some entertainment to a curious observer of human nature to see how a ploughman thinks and feels under the pressure of love, ambition, anxiety, grief, with the like cares and passions, which, however diversified by the modes and manners of life, operate pretty much alike, I believe, in all the species.

"There are numbers in the world who do not want sense to make a figure, so much as an opinion of their own abilities, to put them upon recording their observations, and allowing them the same importance which they do to those which appear in print."—SHENSTONE.

"Pleasing when youth is long expir'd to trace,
The forms our pencil, or our pen design'd!
Such was our youthful air and shape and face!
Such the soft image of our youthful mind."—BIRD.



April, 1783.—Notwithstanding all that has been said against love, respecting the folly and weakness it leads a young unexperienced mind into; still I think it, in a great measure, deserves the highest encomiums that have been passed upon it. If any thing on earth deserves the name of rapture or transport it is the feelings of green eighteen in the company of the mistress of his heart when she repays him with an equal return of affection.

August.—There is certainly some connection between love, and music, and poetry; and therefore I have always thought it a fine touch of Nature, that passage in a modern love composition—

"As towards her cot he joggled along,
Her name was frequent in his song."

For my own part I never had the least thought or inclination of turning poet till I got once heartily in love, and then rhyme and song were, in a manner, the spontaneous language of my heart. The following composition was the first of my performances, and done at an early period of life, when my heart glowed with honest warm simplicity; unacquainted and uncorrupted with the ways of a wicked world. The performance is, indeed, very puerile and silly; but I am always pleased with it, as it recalls to my mind those happy days when my heart was yet honest and my tongue was sincere. The subject of it

was a young girl who really deserved all the praises I have bestowed on her. I not only had this opinion of her then—but I actually think so still, now that the spell is long since broken, and the enchantment at an end—

"O once I lov'd a bonnie lass," &c.*

Lest my works should be thought below criticism; or meet with a critic who, perhaps, will not look on them with so candid and favourable an eye, I am determined to criticise them myself.

The first distich of the first stanza is quite too much in the flimsy strain of our ordinary street ballads; and on the other hand, the second distich is too much in the other extreme. The expression is a little awkward, and the sentiment too serious. Stanza the second I am well pleased with; and I think it conveys a fine idea of that amiable part of the sex—the agreeables; or what in our Scotch dialect we call a sweet sowsy lass. The third stanza has a little of the flimsy turn in it; and the third line has rather too serious a cast. The fourth stanza is a very indifferent one; the first line is, indeed, all in the strain of the second stanza, but the rest is mostly an expletive. The thoughts in the fifth stanza come finely up to my favourite idea—a sweet sowsy lass: the last line, however, halts a little. The same sentiments are kept up with equal spirit and tenderness in the sixth stanza, but the second and fourth lines ending with short syllables hurts the whole. The seventh stanza has several minute faults; but I remember I composed it in a wild enthusiasm of passion, and to this hour I never recollect it, but my heart melts, and my blood sallies at the remembrance.

September.—I entirely agree with that judicious philosopher Mr. Smith in his excellent Theory of Moral Sentiments, that remorse is the most painful sentiment that can embitter the human bosom. Any ordinary pitch of fortitude may bear up tolerably well, under those calamities, in the procurement of which we ourselves have had no hand; but when our own follies or crimes have made us miserable and wretched, to bear it up with manly firmness, and at the same time have a proper penitential sense of our misconduct, is a glorious effort of self-command.

"Of all the numerous ills that hurt our peace," &c.†

March, 1784.—A penitential thought, in the hour of remorse, intended for a tragedy.

"All devil as I am, a damned wretch," &c.‡

I have often observed, in the course of my experience of human life, that every man, even the worst, has something good about him, though very often nothing else than a happy temperament of constitution inclining them

* See vol. i. p. 1. † See vol. i. p. 19. ‡ See vol. i. p. 4.

to this or that virtue; on this, likewise, depend a great many, no man can say how many of our vices; for this reason no man can say in what degree any person besides himself can be, with strict justice, called wicked. Let any of the strictest character for regularity of conduct among us, examine impartially how many of his virtues are owing to constitution and education; how many vices he has never been guilty of, not from any care or vigilance, but from want of opportunity, or some accidental circumstance intervening; how many of the weaknesses of mankind he has escaped because he was out of the line of such temptation; and what often, if not always, weighs more than all the rest, how much he is indebted to the world's good opinion, because the world does not know all; I say any man who can thus think, will scan the failings, nay, the faults and crimes of mankind around him, with a brother's eye.

March, 1784.—I have often coveted the acquaintance of that part of mankind commonly known by the ordinary phrase of blackguards, sometimes farther than was consistent with the safety of my character—those who by thoughtless prodigality, or headstrong passions have been driven to ruin. Though disgraced by follies, nay sometimes “Stain'd with guilt, and crimson'd o'er with crimes,” I have yet found among them, not a few instances, some of the noblest virtues, magnanimity, generosity, disinterested friendship, and even modesty in the highest perfection.

March, 1784.—There was a certain period of my life that my spirit was broke by repeated losses and disasters, which threatened, and indeed effected the utter ruin of my fortune. My body, too, was attacked by that most dreadful distemper, a hypochondria, or confirmed melancholy. In this wretched state, the recollection of which makes me yet shudder, I hung my harp on the willow trees, except in some lucid intervals, in one of which I composed the following—

“O Thou Great Being! what Thou art,” &c. *

April.—As I am what the men of the world, if they knew of such a man, would call a whimsical mortal, I have various sources of pleasure and enjoyment which are, in a manner, peculiar to myself, or some here and there such other out-of-the-way person. Such is the peculiar pleasure I take in the season of winter, more than the rest of the year. This, I believe, may be partly owing to my misfortunes giving my mind a melancholy cast; but there is something even in the—

“Mighty tempest and the hoary waste,
Abrupt and deep, stretched o'er the buried earth.”

which raises the mind to a serious sublimity, favourable to every thing great and noble. There is scarcely any

earthly object gives me more. I don't know if I should call it pleasure, but something which exalts me, something which enraptures me—than to walk in the sheltered side of a wood or high plantation, in a cloudy winter day, and hear a stormy wind howling among the trees, and raving o'er the plain. It is my best season for devotion; my mind is rapt up in a kind of enthusiasm to Him who, in the pompous language of Scripture, “Walks on the wings of the wind.” In one of these seasons, just after a tract of misfortunes, I composed the following:—

“The wintry west extends his blast,” &c. †

April.—The following song is a wild rhapsody, miserably deficient in versification; but as the sentiments are the genuine feelings of my heart, for that reason I have a particular pleasure in coming it over:—

“My father was a farmer,” &c. ‡

April.—Shenstone observes finely that love-verses writ without any real passion are the most nauseous of all conceits; and I have often thought that no man can be a proper critic of love composition, except he himself, in one or more instances, have been a warm votary of this passion. As I have been all along a miserable dupe to love, and have been led into a thousand weaknesses and follies by it, for that reason I put the more confidence in my critical skill in distinguishing foppery and conceit from real passion and nature. Whether the following song will stand the test, I will not pretend to say, because it is my own; only I can say it was, at the time, real:—

“Behind yon hills where Stinchar flows,” &c. §

I think the whole species of young men may be naturally enough divided in two grand classes, which I shall call the grave and the merry; though, by the bye, these terms do not with propriety enough express my ideas. There are indeed some exceptions; some part of the species who, according to my ideas of these divisions, come under neither of them; such are those individuals whom Nature turns off her hand, oftentimes, very like blockheads, but generally, on a nearer inspection, have some things surprisingly clever about them. They are more properly men of conceit than men of genius; men whose heads are filled, and whose faculties are engrossed by some whimsical notions in some art or science; so that they cannot think, nor speak with pleasure, on any other subject. Besides this pedantic species, Nature has always produced some mere insipid blockheads, who may be said to live a vegetable life in this world.

The grave I shall cast into the usual division of those who are goaded on by the love of money; and those whose

* See vol. i. p. 9.

† See vol. i. p. 8. ‡ See vol. i. p. 12. § See vol. i. p. 16.

darling wish is to make a figure in the world. The merry are the men of pleasure of all denominations; the jovial lads, who have too much fire and spirit to have any settled rule of action, but without much deliberation follow the strong impulses of nature: the thoughtless, the careless, the indolent, and in particular he who, with a happy sweetness of natural temper, and a cheerful vacancy of thought, steals through life, generally indeed, in poverty and obscurity; but poverty and obscurity are only evils to him who can sit gravely down and make a repining comparison between his own situation and that of others; and lastly, to grace the quorum, such are, generally, the men whose heads are capable of all the towering of genius, and whose hearts are warmed with the delicacy of feeling.

August.—The foregoing was to have been an elaborate dissertation on the various species of men; but as I cannot please myself in the arrangement of my ideas on the subject, I must wait till farther experience and nicer observations throw more light on the subject. In the mean time I shall set down the following fragment which, as it is the genuine language of my heart, will enable any body to determine which of the classes I belong to:—

“There ’s nought but care on ev’ry han’,
In ev’ry hour that passes, O,” &c.*

As the grand end of human life is to cultivate an intercourse with that BEING to whom we owe life, with every enjoyment that renders life delightful; and to maintain an integrative conduct towards our fellow creatures; that so, by forming piety and virtue into habit, we may be fit members for that society of the pious and the good, which reason and revelation teach us to expect beyond the grave, I do not see that the turn of mind, and pursuits of such a one as the above verses describe—one who spends the hours and thoughts which the vocations of the day can spare with Ossian, Shakespeare, Thomson, Shenstone, Sterne, &c.; or as the maggot takes him, a gun, a fiddle, or a song to make or mend; and at all times some hearts-dear bonny lass in view—I say I do not see that the turn of mind and pursuits of such a one are in the least more inimical to the sacred interests of piety and virtue, than the even lawful, bustling, and straining after the world’s riches and honours: and I do not see but he may gain heaven as well, which, by the bye, is no mean consideration, who steals thro’ the vale of life, amusing himself with every little flower that fortune throws in his way: as he, who straining straight forward, perhaps spattering all about him, gains some of life’s little eninnences, where, after all, he can only see and be seen a little more conspicuously than what, in the pride of his heart, he is apt to term the poor, indolent devil he has left behind him.

August.—A prayer, when fainting fits, and other

* See vol. i. p. 17.

alarming symptoms of a pleurisy or some other dangerous disorder, which indeed still threaten me, first put Nature on the alarm—

“O Thou unknown, Almighty cause
Of all my hope and fear!” &c.*

August.—Misgivings in the hour of despondency and prospect of death—

“Why am I loth to leave this earthly scene,” &c.†

September.—

“O Tibbie, I hae seen the day,” &c.‡

“My girl she ’s airy, she ’s buxom and gay,” &c.§

June, 1785.—John Barleycorn—A song to its own Tune.—I once heard the old song that goes by this name sung, and being very fond of it, and remembering only two or three verses of it, viz., the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, with some scraps which I have interwoven here and there in the following piece:—

“There was three kings into the east,” &c.||

June.—The death and dyin’ words o’ poor Mailie—my ain pet ewe—an unco mournfu’ tale—

“As Mailie and her lambs thegither,” &c.¶

June.—A letter sent to John Lapraik, near Muirkirk, a true, genuine, Scottish bard (April 1, 1785)—

“While briars an’ woodbines budding green,” &c.**

On receiving an answer to the above I wrote the following (April 21, 1785)—

“While new-ca’d kye rowte at the stake,”††

August.—

“When chill November’s surly blast,” &c.‡‡

August.—However I am pleased with the works of our Scotch poets, particularly the excellent Ramsay, and the still more excellent Ferguson, yet I am hurt to see other places of Scotland their towns, rivers, woods, haughs, &c., immortalized in such celebrated performances, whilst my dear native country, the ancient Baileries of Carrick, Kyle, and Cunningham, famous both in ancient and modern times for a gallant and warlike race of inhabitants; a country where civil, and particularly religious liberty have ever found their first support, and their last asylum; a country, the birthplace of many famous philosophers,

* See vol. i. p. 10. † See vol. i. p. 11. ‡ See vol. i. p. 3.
§ See vol. i. p. 23. || See vol. i. p. 13. ¶ See vol. i. p. 13.
** See vol. i. p. 33. †† See vol. i. p. 24. ‡‡ See vol. i. p. 24.

soldiers, and statesmen, and the scene of many important events recorded in Scottish history, particularly a great many of the actions of the glorious Wallace, the Saviour of his country; yet we have never had one Scotch poet of any eminence to make the fertile banks of Irvine, the romantic woodlands and sequestered scenes on Ayr, and the heathy, mountainous source, and winding sweep of Doon, emulate Tay, Forth, Ettrick, Tweed, &c. This is a complaint I would gladly remedy, but, alas! I am far unequal to the task, both in native genius and education.

Obscure I am, and obscure I must be, though no young poet nor young soldier's heart ever beat more fondly for fame than mine—

“And if there is no other scene of being
Where my insatiate wish may have its fill—
This something at my heart that heaves for room,
My best, my dearest part, was made in vain.”

A Fragment—

“When first I came to Stewart Kyle,” &c.*

August.—Har'ste.—A Fragment—

Now breezy win's and slaughtering guns,
Bring Autumn's pleasant weather,
And the mair cock springs on whirling wings
Among the blooming heather.
Now waving crops, with yellow tops,
Delight the weary farmer,
An' the moon shines bright, when I rove at night,
To muse on t

September.—There is a certain irregularity in the old Scotch songs, a redundancy of syllables with respect to that exactness of accent and measure that the English poetry requires, but which glides in, most melodiously, with the respective tunes to which they are set. For instance, the fine old song of “The Mill, Mill, O,” to give it a plain prosaic reading, it halts prodigiously out of measure; on the other hand, the song set to the same tune in Bremner's collection of Scotch songs, which begins “To Fanny fair could I impart,” &c., it is most exact measure, and yet, let them be both sung before a real critic—one above the biases of prejudice, but a thorough judge of Nature—how flat and spiritless will the last appear, how trite, and lamely methodical, compared with the wild-warbling cadence, the heart-moving melody of the first. This particularly is the case with all those airs which end with a hypermetrical syllable. There is a degree of wild irregularity in many of the compositions and fragments which are daily sung to them by my compeers, the common people—a certain happy arrangement

of old Scotch syllables, and yet very frequently nothing, not even like rhyme or sameness of jingle, at the ends of the lines. This has made me sometimes imagine that, perhaps, it might be possible for a Scotch poet, with a nice judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our most favourite airs, particularly that class of them mentioned above, independent of rhyme altogether.

There is a noble sublimity, a heart-melting tenderness in some of these ancient fragments, which show them to be the work of a masterly hand; and it has often given me many a heartache to reflect that such glorious old bards—bards who, very probably, owed all their talents to native genius, yet have described the exploits of heroes, the pangs of disappointment, and the meltings of love with such fine strokes of Nature, and, O mortifying to a bard's vanity, their very names are “buried amongst the wreck of things which were.”

O ye illustrious names unknown! who could feel so strongly and describe so well! the last, the meanest of the Muses' train—one who, though far inferior to your flights, yet eyes your path, and with trembling wing would sometimes soar after you—a poor rustic bard unknown, pays this sympathetic pang to your memory! Some of you tell us, with all the charms of verse, that you have been unfortunate in the world—unfortunate in love; he, too, has felt all the unfitness of a poetic heart for the struggle of a busy, bad world; he has felt the loss of his little fortune, the loss of friends, and worse than all, the loss of the woman he adored. Like you, all his consolation was his Muse—she taught him in rustic measures to complain. Happy could he have done it with your strength of imagination and flow of verse! May the turf rest lightly on your bones! And may you now enjoy that solace and rest which this world rarely gives to the heart tuned to all the feelings of poesy and love!

September.—The following fragment is done something in imitation of the manner of a noble old Scottish piece called “M'Millan's Peggy,” and sings to the tune of Galla water.† My “Montgomerie's Peggy” was my deity for six or eight months. She had been bred, though as the world says, without any just pretence for it, in a style of life rather elegant—But as Vamburgh says in one of his comedies, “My dam'd star found me out” there too, for though I began the affair merely in a *gaieté de cœur*, or to tell the truth, what would scarcely be believed, a vanity of showing my parts in courtship, particularly my abilities at a *billet-doux*, which I always piqued myself upon, made me lay siege to her; and when, as I always do in my foolish gallantries, I had battered myself into a very warm affection for her, she told me, one day, in a flag of truce, that her fortress had been for some time before the rightful property of another; but with the greatest friendship and

* See vol. i. p. 22.

† “Jeanie Armour.” For variation see vol. i. p. 1.

‡ Mr. Syme says “this explains the love letters to Begbie.”

politeness, she offered me every alliance except actual possession. I found out afterwards that what she told me of a pre-engagement was really true; but it cost some heart-aches to get rid of the affair.

I have even tried to imitate, in this extempore thing, that irregularity in the rhyme which, when judiciously done, has such a fine effect on the ear—

“Altho’ my bed were in yon muir,” &c.*

September.—Another fragment in imitation of an old Scotch song, well known among the country ingle sides—I cannot tell the name neither of the song nor the tune, but they are in fine unison with one another. By the way, these old Scottish airs are so nobly sentimental, that when one would compose to them, to “south the tune,” as our Scotch phrase is, over and over, is the readiest way to catch the inspiration and raise the bard into that glorious enthusiasm so strongly characteristic of our old Scotch poetry. I shall here set down one verse of the piece mentioned above, both to mark the song and tune I mean, and likewise as a debt I owe to the author, as the repeating of that verse has lighted up my flame a thousand times.

Alluding to the misfortunes he feelingly laments before this verse—

“When clouds in skies do come together
To hide the brightness of the sun,
There will surely be some pleasant weather
When a’ thir storms are past and gone.”



Though fickle fortune has deceiv’d me.
She promis’d fair and perform’d but ill;
Of mistress, friends, and wealth bereav’d me,
Yet I hear a heart shall support me still.

I’ll act with prudence as lang’s I’m able;
But if success I must never find,
Then come Misfortune, I bid thee welcome,
I’ll meet thee with an undaunted mind.

The above was an extempore under the pressure of a heavy train of misfortunes, which, indeed, threatened to undo me altogether. It was just at the close of that dreadful period already mentioned;† and though the weather has brightened up a little with me, yet there has always been since a “tempest brewing round me in the grim sky” of futurity, which I pretty plainly see will some time or other, perhaps ere long, overwhelm me, and drive me into some doleful dell to pine in solitary, squalid wretchedness. However, as I hope my poor country muse, who, all rustic, awkward, and unpolished as she is, has more

charms for me than any other of the pleasures of life beside—as I hope she will not then desert me, I may, even then, learn to be, if not happy, at least easy, and south a sang to sooth my misery.

’Twas at the same time I set about composing an air in the old Scotch style. I am not musical scholar enough to prick down my tune properly, so it can never see the light, and perhaps ’tis no great matter; but the following were the verses I composed to suit it:—

“O raging Fortune’s withering blast,” &c.‡

The tune consisted of three parts, so that the above verses just went through the whole air.

October, 1785.—If ever any young man, on the vestibule of the world, chance to throw his eye over these pages, let him pay a warm attention to the following observations; as I assure him they are the fruit of a poor devil’s dear-bought experience. I have literally, like that great poet and great gallant, and by consequence, that great fool, Solomon—“turned my eyes to behold madness and folly.” Nay, I have, with all the ardour of a lively, fanciful, and whimsical imagination, accompanied with a warm, feeling, poetic heart—shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship.

In the first place, let my pupil, as he tenders his own peace, keep up a regular, warm intercourse with the Deity. . . .

[Here the MS. closes abruptly.]



No. XII.

TO MISS MARGARET KENNEDY.

1785.

MADAM,

PERMIT me to present you with the inclosed song, as a small though grateful tribute for the honour of your acquaintance. I have in these verses attempted some faint sketches of your portrait in the unembellished, simple manner of descriptive truth. Flattery I leave to your lovers, whose exaggerating fancies may make them imagine you are still nearer perfection than you really are.

Poets, Madam, of all mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of beauty; as, if they are really poets of Nature’s making, their feelings must be finer, and their taste more delicate than most of the world. In the cheerful bloom of Spring, or the pensive mildness of Autumn, the grandeur of Summer, or the hoary majesty of Winter, the poet feels

* See vol. i. p. 5.

VOL. II.

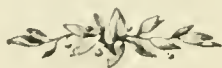
† See the passage under March, 1784.

‡ See vol. i. p. 11.

a charm unknown to the most of his species: even the sight of a fine flower, or the company of a fine woman (by far the finest part of God's works below), have sensations for the poetic heart that the herd of men are strangers to. On this last account, Madam, I am, as in many other things, indebted to Mr. Hamilton's kindness in introducing me to you. Your lovers may view you with a wish, I look on you with pleasure; their hearts, in your presence, may glow with desire, mine rises with admiration.

That the arrows of misfortune, however they should, as incident to humanity, glance a slight wound, may never reach your heart—that the snares of villainy may never beset you in the road of life—that innocence may hand you by the path of honour to the dwelling of peace—is the sincere wish of him who has the honour to be, &c.,

R. B.



No. XIII.

TO MISS ———.*

MY DEAR COUNTRYWOMAN,

I AM so impatient to show you that I am once more at peace with you, that I send you the book I mentioned directly, rather than wait the uncertain time of my seeing you. I am afraid I have mislaid or lost Collins' Poems, which I promised to Miss Irvin. If I can find them, I will forward them by you: if not, you must apologize for me.

I know you will laugh at it when I tell you that your piano and you together have played the deuce somehow about my heart. My breast has been widowed these many months, and I thought myself proof against the fascinating witchcraft; but I am afraid you will "feelingly convince me what I am." I say, I am afraid, because I am not sure what is the matter with me. I have one miserable bad symptom; when you whisper, or look kindly to another, it gives me a draught of damnation. I have a kind of wayward wish to be ten minutes by yourself, though what I would say, Heaven above knows, for I am sure I know not. I have no formed design in all this; but just, in the nakedness of my heart, write you down a mere matter-of-fact story. You may perhaps give yourself airs of distance on this, and that will completely cure me; but I wish you would not: just let us meet, if you please, in the old beaten way of friendship.

I will not subscribe myself your humble servant, for that is a phrase, I think, at least fifty miles off from the

* Unknown. See LIFE.

heart; but I will conclude with sincerely wishing that the Great Protector of innocence may shield you from the barbed dart of calumny, and hand you by the covert snare of deceit.

R. B.



No. XIV.

TO MR. JOHN RICHMOND, EDINBURGH.†

MOSSGIEL, *February 17, 1786.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE not time at present to upbraid you for your silence and neglect; I shall only say I received yours with great pleasure. I have inclosed you a piece of rhyming ware for your perusal. I have been very busy with the Muses since I saw you, and have composed, among several others, "The Ordination," a poem on Mr. McKinlay's being called to Kilmarnock; "Scotch Drink," a poem; "The Cottar's Saturday Night;" "An Address to the De'il," &c. I have likewise completed my poem on the "Dogs," but have not shown it to the world. My chief patron now is Mr. Aiken in Ayr, who is pleased to express great approbation of my works. Be so good as send me Fergusson, by Connell,‡ and I will remit you the money. I have no news to acquaint you with about Mauchline; they are just going on in the old way. I have some very important news with respect to myself, not the most agreeable—news I am sure you cannot guess, but I shall give you the particulars another time. I am extremely happy with Smith;§ he is the only friend I have now in Mauchline. I can scarcely forgive your long neglect of me, and I beg you will let me hear from you regularly by Connell. If you would act your part as a friend, I am sure neither good nor bad fortune should estrange or alter me. Excuse haste, as I got yours but yesterday. I am, my dear Sir, yours,

ROBERT BURNES.



No. XV.

TO JAMES SMITH, MAUCHLINE.

... Against two things I am fixed as fate—staying at home; and owning her conjugally. The first, by

† Originally a clerk with Gavin Hamilton. See LIFE.

‡ The Mauchline carrier.

§ James Smith, shopkeeper in Mauchline, to whom the Poet addresses one of his poetical epistles, "Dear Smith," &c. See vol. i. p. 63.

Heaven, I will not do! the last, by Hell, I will never do!
A good God bless you, and make you happy, up to the
warmest weeping wish of parting friendship. . . .

If you see Jean, tell her I will meet her, so help me
God in my hour of need.

R. B.



No. XVI.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.*

MOSSGIEL, 3rd March, 1786.

SIR,

I HAVE done myself the pleasure of complying
with your request in sending you my Cottager. If you
have a leisure minute, I should be glad you would copy
it and return me either the original or the transcript, as
I have not a copy of it by me, and I have a friend who
wishes to see it,

“Now Kennedy, if foot or horse,” &c. †

ROBERT BURNES.



No. XVII.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR,‡ KILMARNOCK.

MOSSGIEL, 20th March, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I AM heartily sorry I had not the pleasure of seeing
you as you returned through Mauchline; but as I was
engaged, I could not be in town before the evening.

I here enclose you my “Scotch Drink,” and “may the
— follow with a blessing for your edification.” I hope,
some time before we hear the gowk, to have the pleasure
of seeing you in Kilmarnock, when I intend to have a
gill between us, in a mutchkin-stomp, which will be a
great comfort and consolation to,

Dear Sir, your humble servant,

ROBERT BURNES.

* Kennedy, factor to the Earl of Dumfries, afterwards to Lord
Breadalbane.

† See vol. i. p. 79.

‡ A great early friend of Burns, and an active promoter both of the
Kilmarnock and Edinburgh editions of his poems; of the latter he
took forty copies.

No. XVIII.

TO MR. AIKEN.*

MOSSGIEL, 3rd April, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I RECEIVED your kind letter with double pleasure,
on account of the second flattering instance of Mrs. C.'s
notice and approbation. I assure you I

“Turn out the brunt side o' my shin,”

as the famous Ramsay, of jingling memory, says of such
a patroness. Present her my most grateful acknowledg-
ments in your very best manner of telling truth. I have
inscribed the following stanza on the blank leaf of Miss
[Hannah] More's work.

Thou flattering mark of friendship kind, &c. †

My proposals for publishing I am just going to send
to the press. I expect to hear from you by the first
opportunity.

I am ever, dear Sir, yours,

ROBERT BURNES.‡



No. XIX.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, Esq., AYR. §

June, 1786.

HONOURED SIR,

MY proposals came to hand last night, and
knowing that you would wish to have it in your power to
do me a service as early as any body, I enclose you half a
sheet of them. I must consult you, first opportunity, on
the propriety of sending my *quondam* friend, Mr. Aiken, a
copy. If he is now reconciled to my character as an
honest man, I would do it with all my soul; but I would
not be beholden to the noblest being ever God created, if
he imagined me to be a rascal. *Apropos*, old Mr. Armour
prevailed with him to mutilate that unlucky paper yester-
day. Would you believe it? though I had not a hope,
nor even a wish to make her mine after her conduct; yet
when he told me the names were cut out of the paper, my
heart died within me, and he cut my veins with the news.
Perdition seize her falsehood!

ROBERT BURNS.

* Aiken, to whom the “Cottar's Saturday Night” is addressed.

† See vol. i. p. 80.

‡ The last letter in which the Poet signed himself *Burness*.

§ Banker in Ayr, once provost, and a most respectable man, to whom
the “Brigs o' Ayr” were addressed. He died in 1812.

No. XX.

TO MR. M'WHINNIE, WRITER, AYR.

MOSSGIEL, 17th April, 1786.

It is injuring some hearts, those hearts that elegantly bear the impression of the good Creator, to say to them you give them the trouble of obliging a friend; for this reason, I only tell you that I gratify my own feelings in requesting your friendly offices with respect to the enclosed,* because I know it will gratify yours to assist me in it to the utmost of your power.

I have sent you four copies, as I have no less than eight dozen, which is a great deal more than I shall ever need.

Be sure to remember a poor poet militant in your prayers. He looks forward with fear and trembling to that, to him, important moment which stamps the die with—with—with, perhaps, the eternal disgrace of,

My dear Sir, your humble, afflicted, tormented,

ROBERT BURNS.



No. XXI.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.

MOSSGIEL, 20th April, 1786.

SIR,

By some neglect in Mr. Hamilton, I did not hear of your kind request for a subscription paper till this day. I will not attempt any acknowledgment for this, nor the manner in which I see your name in Mr. Hamilton's subscription list. Allow me only to say, Sir, I feel the weight of the debt.

I have here, likewise, enclosed a small piece, the very latest of my productions.† I am a good deal pleased with some sentiments myself, as they are just the native querulous feelings of a heart which, as the elegantly melting Gray says, "melancholy has marked for her own."

Our race comes on apace—that much expected scene of revelry and mirth; but to me it brings no joy equal to that meeting with you which you last flattered the expectation of,

Sir, your indebted humble servant,

R. B.

* A prospectus of his poems. Mr. M'Whinnie subscribed himself, and got others to do so.

† The "Mountain Daisy," in the original MS. it is called "The Gowan."

No. XXII.

EGOTISMS FROM MY OWN SENSATIONS.

May, ———

I DON'T well know what is the reason of it, but somehow or other, though I am, when I have a mind, pretty generally beloved, yet I never could get the art of commanding respect. I imagine it is owing to my being deficient in what Sterne calls "that understrapping virtue of discretion." I am so apt to a *lapsus lingua*, that I sometimes think the character of a certain great man I have read of somewhere is very much *apropos* to myself, that he was "a compound of great talents and great folly."

N. B.—To try if I can discover the causes of this wretched infirmity, and, if possible, to mend it.



No. XXIII.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY.‡

MOSSGIEL, 17th May, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE sent you the above hasty copy as I promised. In about three or four weeks I shall probably set the press agoing. I am much hurried at present, otherwise your diligence so very friendly in my subscription should have a more lengthened acknowledgment from,

Dear Sir, your obliged servant,

R. B.



No. XXIV.

TO MR. DAVID BRICE.§

MOSSGIEL, June 12, 1786.

DEAR BRICE,

I RECEIVED your message by G. Paterson, and as I am very throng at present, I just write to let you know that there is such a worthless, rhyming reprobate as your humble servant still in the land of the living, though I can scarcely say in the place of hope. I have no news to tell you that will give me any pleasure to mention, or you to hear.

‡ Enclosing the author's "Epistle to John Rankine." See vol. i. p. 21.
§ He was a shoemaker in Glasgow.

Poor, ill-advised, ungrateful Armour came home on Friday last.* You have heard all the particulars of that affair, and a black affair it is. What she thinks of her conduct now I don't know; one thing I do know—she has made me completely miserable. Never man loved, or rather adored, a woman more than I did her; and to confess a truth between you and me, I do still love her to distraction after all, although I won't tell her so if I were to see her, which I don't want to do. My poor dear unfortunate Jean! how happy have I been in thy arms! It is not the losing her that makes me so unhappy, but for her sake I feel most severely: I foresee she is in the road to, I am afraid, eternal ruin.

May Almighty God forgive her ingratitude and perjury to me, as I from my very soul forgive her; and may His grace be with her and bless her in all her future life! I can have no nearer idea of the place of eternal punishment than what I have felt in my own breast on her account. I have tried often to forget her; I have run into all kinds of dissipation and riots, mason-meetings, drinking-matches, and other mischief, to drive her out of my head, but all in vain. And now for a grand cure; the ship is on her way home that is to take me out to Jamaica; and then, farewell, dear old Scotland; and farewell, dear ungrateful Jean! for never, never will I see you more.

You will have heard that I am going to commence poet in print; and to-morrow my works go to the press. I expect it will be a volume of about two hundred pages—it is just the last foolish action I intend to do, and then turn a wise man as fast as possible.

Believe me to be, dear Brice, your friend and well-wisher,

R. B.



No. XXV.

TO MR. JAMES BURNES, WRITER,
MONTROSE.

MOSSGIEL, NEAR MAUCHLINE, July 5, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

I WROTE you about three half-twelve months ago by post, and I wrote you about a year ago by a private hand, and I have not had the least return from you. I have just half-a-minute to write you by an Aberdeen gentleman of my acquaintance, who promises to wait upon you with this on his arrival, or soon after: I intend to send you a letter accompanied with a singular curiosity in about five or six weeks hence. I shall then

* She had gone in May, 1786, to reside in Paisley with a relation of her mother's.

write you more at large; meanwhile you are just to look on this as a *memento me*. I hope all friends are well. I am ever, my dear Sir, your affectionate cousin,

ROBERT BURNES.



No. XXVI.

TO MR. JOHN RICHMOND, EDINBURGH.

MOSSGIEL, 9th July, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WITH the sincerest grief I read your letter. You are truly a son of misfortune. I shall be extremely anxious to hear from you how your health goes on; if it is any way re-establishing, or if Leith promises well: in short, how you feel in the inner man.

No news worth any thing; only godly Bryan was in the inquisition yesterday, and half the countryside as witnesses against him. He still stands out steady and denying: but proof was led yesternight of circumstances highly suspicious, almost *de facto*; one of the girls made oath that she upon a time rashly entered the house, to speak in your cant, "in the hour of cause."

I have waited on Armour since her return home; not from the least view of reconciliation, but merely to ask for her health, and to you I will confess it, from a foolish hankering fondness, very ill placed indeed. The mother forbade me the house, nor did Jean show that penitence that might have been expected. However, the priest, I am informed, will give me a certificate as a single man, if I comply with the rules of the church, which for that very reason I intend to do.

I am going to put on sackcloth and ashes this day. I am indulged so far as to appear in my own seat. *Peccavi, pater, miserere mei*. My book will be ready in a fortnight. If you have any subscribers, return them by Connell.* The Lord stand with the righteous; amen, amen.

R. B.



No. XXVII.

TO MR. DAVID BRICE, SHOEMAKER,
GLASGOW.

MOSSGIEL, 17th July, 1786.

I HAVE been so throng printing my poems, that I could scarcely find as much time as to write to you. Poor

* Connell the carrier.

Armour is come back again to Mauchline, and I went to call for her, and her mother forbade me the house, nor did she herself express much sorrow for what she has done. I have already appeared publicly in church, and was indulged in the liberty of standing in my own seat. I do this to get a certificate as a bachelor, which Mr. Auld has promised me. I am now fixed to go for the West Indies in October. Jean and her friends insisted much that she should stand along with me in the kirk, but the minister would not allow it, which bred a great trouble I assure you, and I am blamed as the cause of it, though I am sure I am innocent; but I am very much pleased, for all that, not to have had her company. I have no news to tell you that I remember. I am really happy to hear of your welfare, and that you are so well in Glasgow. I must certainly see you before I leave the country. I shall expect to hear from you soon, and am, dear Bree, yours,
R. B.



No. XXVIII.

TO JOHN RICHMOND, EDINBURGH.

OLD ROME FOREST, 30th July, 1786.

MY DEAR RICHMOND,

My hour is now come—you and I will never meet in Britain more. I have orders, within three weeks at farthest, to repair aboard the Nancy, Captain Smith, from Clyde to Jamaica, and to call at Antigua. This, except to our friend Smith, whom God long preserve, is a secret about Mauchline. Would you believe it? Armour has got a warrant to throw me in jail till I find security for an enormous sum. This they keep an entire secret, but I got it by a channel they little dream of; and I am wandering from one friend's house to another, and like a true son of the gospel, "have nowhere to lay my head." I know you will pour an execration on her head, but spare the poor, ill-advised girl, for my sake; though, may all the furies that rend the injured, enraged lover's bosom, await her mother until her latest hour! I write in a moment of rage, reflecting on my miserable situation—exiled, abandoned, forlorn. I can write no more—let me hear from you by the return of coach. I will write you ere I go.

I am, dear Sir, yours here and hereafter,

R. B.

No. XXIX.

TO MR. JOHN KENNEDY, DUMFRIES HOUSE

KILMARNOCK, August, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR truly facetious epistle of the 3rd inst. gave me much entertainment. I was only sorry I had not the pleasure of seeing you as I passed your way, but we shall bring up all our leeway on Wednesday, the 16th current, when I hope to have it in my power to call on you and take a kind, very probably a last adieu, before I go for Jamaica; and I expect orders to repair to Greenock every day. I have at last made my public appearance, and am solemnly inaugurated into the numerous class. Could I have got a carrier, you should have had a score of vouchers for my authorship; but now you have them, let them speak for themselves—

Farewell, dear friend! may gude luck hit you,
And 'mang her favourites admit you!
If e'er detraction shore to smit you,
May nane believe him!
And ony deil that thinks to get you,
Good Lord deceive him.

R. B.



No. XXX.

TO JOHN LOGAN, Esq., OF LAIGHT.

KILMARNOCK, 10th August, 1786.

SIR,

I GRATEFULLY thank you for your kind offices in promoting my subscription, and still more for your very friendly letter. The first was doing me a favour, but the last was doing me an honour. I am in such a bustle at present, preparing for my West India voyage—as I expect a letter every day from the master of the vessel, to repair directly to Greenock—that I am under a necessity to return you the subscription bills, and trouble you with the quantum of copies till called for, or otherwise transmitted to the gentlemen who have subscribed. Mr. Bruce Campbell is already supplied with two copies, and I here send you twenty copies more. If any of the gentlemen are supplied from any other quarter, 'tis no matter; the copies can be returned.

If orders from Greenock do not hinder, I intend doing myself the honour of waiting on you, Wednesday the 16th inst.

I am much hurt, Sir, that I must trouble you with the copies; but, circumstanced as I am, I know no other way your friends can be supplied. I have the honour to be, Sir, your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.



No. XXXI.

TO MONS. JAMES SMITH, MAUCHLINE.*

MOSSGIEL, *Monday Morning, 14th August, 1786.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I WENT to Dr. Douglas yesterday, fully resolved to take the opportunity of Captain Smith; but I found the Doctor with a Mr. and Mrs. White, both Jamaicans, and they have deranged my plans altogether. They assure him, that to send me from Savannah la Mar to Port Antonio will cost my master, Charles Douglas, upwards of fifty pounds; besides running the risk of throwing myself into a pleuritic fever in consequence of hard travelling in the sun. On these accounts he refuses sending me with Smith; but a vessel sails from Greenock the first of September, right for the place of my destination. The captain of her is an intimate friend of Mr. Gavin Hamilton's, and as good a fellow as heart could wish: with him I am destined to go. Where I shall shelter I know not, but I hope to weather the storm. Perish the drop of blood of mine that fears them! I know their worst, and am prepared to meet it—

"I'll laugh, an' sing, an' shake my leg,
As lang's I dow."

On Thursday morning, if you can muster as much self-denial as to be out of bed about seven o'clock, I shall see you as I ride through Cumnock. After all, Heaven bless the sex! I feel there is still happiness for me among them—

"O woman, lovely woman! Heaven designed you
To temper man!—we had been brutes without you!"

R. B.



No. XXXII

TO MONS. THOMAS CAMPBELL, PENCLOE.

NEW CUMNOCK, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE met with few men in my life whom I more wished to see again than you, and chance seems industrious to disappoint me of that pleasure. I came

* See previous Note, vol. ii. p. 106.

here yesterday fully resolved to see you and Mr. Logan at New Cumnock; but a conjuncture of circumstances conspired against me. Having an opportunity of sending you a line, I joyfully embrace it. It is perhaps the last mark of our friendship you can receive from me on this side of the Atlantic.

Farewell! May you be happy up to the wishes of parting friendship!

R. B.

MR. J. MERRY'S, *Saturday Morn.*



No. XXXIII.

TO WILLIAM NIVEN, MERCHANT, MAYBOLE.

CARE OF THOMAS PIPER, SURGEON—TO BE LEFT AT
DR. CHARLES' SHOP, AYR.

MOSSGIEL, *30th August, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE been very throng ever since I saw you, and have not got the whole of my promise performed to you; but you know the old proverb, "The break o' a day's no the break o' a bargain." Have patience and I will pay you all.

I thank you with the most heartfelt sincerity for the worthy knot of lads you introduced me to. Never did I meet with so many congenial souls together, without one dissonant jar in the concert. To all and each of them make my friendly compliments, particularly "Spunkie youth, Tammie." Remember me in the most respectful manner to the Bailie, and Mrs. Niven, to Mr. Dun, and the two truly worthy old gentlemen I had the honour of being introduced to on Friday; tho' I am afraid the conduct you forced me on may make them see me in a light I would fondly think I do not deserve.

I will perform the next of my promise soon; in the meantime, remember this—never blaze my songs among the million, as I would abhor to hear every prentice mouthing my poor performances in the streets. Every one of my Maybole friends is welcome to a copy if they choose; but I don't wish them to go farther. I mean it as a small token of my respect for them—a respect as sincere as the love of dying saints. I am ever, my dear William, your obliged,

R. B.

No. XXXIV.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR, KILMARNOCK.

MOSSGIEL, Friday Morning.

MY FRIEND, AND BROTHER,

WARM recollections of an absent friend presses so hard upon my heart, that I send him the prefixed bagatelle (*The Calf*), pleased with the thought it will greet the man of my bosom, and be a kind of distant language of friendship.

You will have heard that poor Armour has repaid me double. A very fine boy and a girl have awakened a thought and feelings that thrill, some with tender pressure and some with foreboding anguish, through my soul.

The poem was nearly an extemporaneous production, on a wager with Mr. Hamilton, that I would not produce a poem on the subject in a given time.

If you think it worth while, read it to Charles and Mr. W. Parker, and if they choose a copy of it, it is at their service, as they are men whose friendship I shall be proud to claim, both in this world and in that which is to come.

I believe all hopes of staying at home will be abortive; but more of this when, in the latter part of next week, you shall be troubled with a visit from,

My dear Sir,

Your most devoted,

R. B.



No. XXXV.

TO MR. JAMES BURNESSE, WRITER,
MONTROSE.**MOSSGIEL, Tuesday, noon, September 26, 1786.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I THIS moment receive yours—receive it with the honest, hospitable warmth of a friend's welcome. Whatever comes from you wakens always up the better blood about my heart, which your kind little recollections of my parental friend carries as far as it will go. 'Tis there that man is blest! 'Tis there, my friend, man feels a consciousness of something within him above the trodden clod! The grateful reverence to the hoary earthly authors of his being—the burning glow when he clasps the woman of his soul to his bosom—the tender yearnings of heart for the little angels to whom he has given existence—these

* Written when preparing to go to the West Indies.

Nature has poured in milky streams about the human heart; and the man who never rouses them to action by the inspiring influences of their proper objects, loses by far the most pleasurable part of his existence.

My departure is uncertain, but I do not think it will be till after harvest. I will be on very short allowance of time indeed, if I do not comply with your friendly invitation. When it will be I don't know; but if I can make my wish good, I will endeavour to drop you a line some time before. My best compliments to Mrs. Burness; I should be equally mortified should I drop in when she is abroad, but of that I suppose there is little chance.

What I have wrote Heaven knows; I have not time to review it: so accept of it in the beaten way of friendship. With the ordinary phrase, and perhaps rather more than the ordinary sincerity— I am, dear Sir, ever yours,

R. B.



No. XXXVI.

TO MRS. STEWART OF STAIR.†

1786.

MADAM,

THE hurry of my preparations for going abroad has hindered me from performing my promises so soon as I intended. I have here sent you a parcel of songs, &c., which never made their appearance, except to a friend or two at most. The song, to the tune of "*Ettrick Banks*," you will easily see the impropriety of exposing much, even in manuscript. I think, myself, it has some merit; both as a tolerable description of one of nature's sweetest scenes, a July evening; and one of the finest pieces of nature's workmanship, the finest indeed we know anything of—an amiable, beautiful young woman: but I have no common friend to procure me that permission, without which I would not dare to spread the copy.

I am quite aware, Madam, what task the world would assign me in this letter. The obscure bard, when any of the great condescend to take notice of him, should heap the altar with the incense of flattery. Their high ancestry, their own great and godlike qualities and actions, should be recounted with the most exaggerated description. This, Madam, is a task for which I am altogether unfit. Besides a certain disqualifying pride of heart, I know nothing of your connections in life, and have no access to where your real character is to be found—the company of your compeers; and more, I am afraid that even the most

† On the eve of my intended going to Jamaica. See the song "*Flow gently, sweet Afton*," vol. i. p. 204.

refined adulation is by no means the road to your good opinion.

One feature of your character I shall ever with grateful pleasure remember—the reception I got when I had the honour of waiting on you at Stair. I am little acquainted with politeness, but I know a good deal of benevolence of temper and goodness of heart. Surely, did those in exalted stations know how happy they could make some classes of their inferiors by condescension and affability, they would never stand so high, measuring out with every look the height of their elevation, but condescend as sweetly as did Mrs. Stewart of Stair.

R. B.



No. XXXVII.

TO MR. ROBERT AIKEN.*

AYRSHIRE, 1786.

SIR,

I WAS with Wilson, my printer, to-day, and settled all our by-gone matters between us. After I had paid him all demands, I made him the offer of the second edition, on the hazard of being paid out of the first and readiest, which he declined. By his account, the paper of a thousand copies would cost about twenty-seven pounds, and the printing about fifteen or sixteen; he offers to agree to this for the printing, if I will advance for the paper, but this, you know, is out of my power; so farewell hopes of a second edition 'till I grow richer! an epoch which, I think, will arrive at the payment of the British national debt.†

There is scarcely anything hurts me so much in being disappointed of my second edition, as not having it in my power to show my gratitude to Mr. Ballantine, by publishing my poem of "The Brigs o' Ayr." I would detest myself as a wretch, if I thought I were capable, in a very long life, of forgetting the honest, warm, and tender delicacy with which he enters into my interests. I am

* "This letter was evidently written under the distress of mind occasioned by our poet's separation from Mrs. Burns"—CURRIE—and between the settlement with Wilson and the proposals for a new edition. See LIFE.

† "John Wilson, printer of the first edition of Burns' Poems, on whom the poet composed the satirical lines—

"Who'er thou art, O reader, know,
That death has murder'd Johnnie!
And here his body lies fu' low;
For saul, he ne'er had ony."

—AYRSHIRE CONTEMPORARIES OF BURNS.

sometimes pleased with myself in my grateful sensations; but I believe, on the whole, I have very little merit in it, as my gratitude is not a virtue, the consequence of reflection, but sheerly the instinctive emotion of a heart too inattentive to allow worldly maxims and views to settle into selfish habits.

I have been feeling all the various rotations and movements within, respecting the Excise. There are many things plead strongly against it: the uncertainty of getting soon into business; the consequences of my follies, which may perhaps make it impracticable for me to stay at home; and besides, I have for some time been pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society or the vagaries of the muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner. All these reasons urge me to go abroad, and to all these reasons I have only one answer—the feelings of a father. This, in the present mood I am in, overbalances every thing that can be laid in the scale against it.

You may perhaps think it an extravagant fancy, but it is a sentiment which strikes home to my very soul: though sceptical in some points of our current belief, yet I think I have every evidence for the reality of a life beyond the stinted hour of our present existence. If so, then how should I, in the presence of that tremendous Being, the Author of existence, how should I meet the reproaches of those who stand to me in the dear relation of children, whom I deserted in the smiling innocence of helpless infancy? O thou unknown Power!—thou Almighty God who hast lighted up reason in my breast, and blessed me with immortality! I have frequently wandered from that order and regularity necessary for the perfection of thy works, yet thou hast never left me nor forsaken me!

Since I wrote the foregoing sheet I have seen something of the storms of mischief thickening over my folly-devoted head. Should you, my friend, my benefactor, be successful in your applications‡ for me, perhaps it may not be in my power in that way to reap the fruit of your friendly efforts. What I have written in the preceding pages is the settled tenor of my present resolution; but should inimical circumstances forbid me closing with your kind offer, or enjoying it only threaten to entail further misery——.

To tell the truth, I have little reason for this last complaint, as the world in general has been kind to me fully

‡ So early as this period some of the poet's friends were endeavouring to obtain for him an appointment in the Excise.

up to my deserts. I was, for some time past, fast getting into the pining distrustful snarl of the misanthrope. I saw myself alone, unfit for the struggle of life, shrinking at every rising cloud in the chance-directed atmosphere of fortune, while, all defenceless, I looked about in vain for a cover. It never occurred to me, at least never with the force it deserved, that this world is a busy scene, and man a creature destined for a progressive struggle; and that, however I might possess a warm heart and inoffensive manners (which last, by the bye, was rather more than I could well boast), still, more than these passive qualities, there was something to be done. When all my school-fellows and youthful compeers (those misguided few excepted who joined, to use a Gentoo phrase, the "halla-chores" of the human race) were striking off with eager hope and earnest intent, in some one or other of the many paths of busy life, I was "standing idle in the marketplace," or only left the chase of the butterfly from flower to flower, to hunt from whim to whim.

You see, Sir, that if to know one's errors were a probability of mending them, I stand a fair chance; but, according to the reverend Westminster divines, though conviction must precede conversion, it is very far from always implying it.

R. B.



No. XXXVIII.

TO JOHN MACKENZIE, Esq., SURGEON,
MAUCHLINE.*

Wednesday Morning, 1st November, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I NEVER spent an afternoon among great folks with half that pleasure as when, in company with you, I had the honour of paying my devoirs to that plain, honest, worthy man, the professor [Dugald Stewart]. I would be delighted to see him perform acts of kindness and friendship, though I were not the object; he does it with such a grace. I think his character, divided into ten parts, stands thus—four parts Socrates—four parts Nathanael—and two parts Shakspeare's Brutus.

The foregoing verses were really extempore, but a little corrected since.† They may entertain you a little, with

* Dr. Mackenzie was a surgeon in Mauchline and early friend of the Poet's. He was married to one of the Mauchline Belles (see POEMS), and afterwards practised for many years at Irvine. In his latter days he retired to Edinburgh, where he died, January 11, 1837.

† The verses were those on Burns' dining with Lord Daer. See POEMS.

the help of that partiality with which you are so good as to favour the performances of,

Dear Sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.



No. XXXIX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.‡

AYRSHIRE, July, 1786.

MADAM,

I AM truly sorry I was not at home yesterday, when I was so much honoured with your order for my copies, and incomparably more by the handsome compliments you are pleased to pay my poetic abilities. I am fully persuaded that there is not any class of mankind so feelingly alive to the titillations of applause as the sons of Parnassus: nor is it easy to conceive how the heart of the poor bard dances with rapture, when those, whose character in life gives them a right to be polite judges, honour him with their approbation. Had you been thoroughly acquainted with me, Madam, you could not have touched my darling heart-chord more sweetly than by noticing my attempts to celebrate your illustrious ancestor, the Saviour of his country.

"Great patriot hero! ill-requited chief!"

The first book I met with in my early years, which I perused with pleasure, was "The Life of Hannibal;" the next was "The History of Sir William Wallace:" for several of my earlier years I had few other authors; and many a solitary hour have I stole out, after the laborious vocations of the day, to shed a tear over their glorious, but unfortunate stories. In those boyish days I remember, in particular, being struck with that part of Wallace's story where these lines occur—

"Synè to the Leglen wood, when it was late,
To make a silent and a safe retreat."

I chose a fine summer Sunday, the only day my line of life allowed, and walked half a dozen of miles to pay my respects to the Leglen wood, with as much devout enthusiasm as ever pilgrim did to Loretto; and as I explored every den and dell where I could suppose my heroic countryman to have lodged, I recollect (for even then I was a rhymist) that my heart glowed with a wish to be able to make a song on him in some measure equal to his merits.

R. B.

‡ See LIFE. Mrs. Dunlop got back all her letters to Burns from Dr. Currie, and perhaps they still exist, but the family have never been willing to print them.

No. XL.

TO MR. ARCHIBALD LAWRIE, NEWMILNS.*

MOSSGIEL, 13th November, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE, along with this, sent two volumes of Ossian, with the remaining volume of the songs. Ossian I am not in such a hurry about; but I wish the songs, with the volume of the Scotch poets, as soon as they can conveniently be despatched. If they are left at Mr. Wilson the bookseller's shop in Kilmarnock, they will easily reach me.

My most respectful compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Lawrie, and a poet's warmest wishes for their happiness to the young ladies, particularly the fair musician, whom I think much better qualified than ever David was, or could be, to charm an evil spirit out of Saul.

Indeed, it needs not the feelings of a poet to be interested in the welfare of one of the sweetest scenes of domestic peace and kindred love that ever I saw; as I think the peaceful unity of St. Margaret's Hill can only be excelled by the harmonious concord of the Apocalyptic Zion.

R. B.



No. XLI.

TO MONS. ARCHIBALD LAWRIE,

COLLINE DE ST. MARGARETE.

MAUCHLINE, 15th November, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

If convenient, please return me by Connel, the bearer, the two volumes of songs I left last time I was at St. Margaret's Hill.

My best compliments to all the good family. *A Dieu je vous commende.*

R. B.



No. XLII.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR, KILMARNOCK.

MOSSGIEL, 18th November, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

INCLOSED you have "Tam Samson," as I intend to print him. I am thinking for my Edinburgh expedition

* Archibald Lawrie, son of the Rev. George Lawrie, and married to Miss Adair, sister-in-law to Charlotte Hamilton. See LIFE.

on Monday or Tuesday come se'en-night, for pos. I will see you on Tuesday first.

I am ever, your much indebted,

R. B.



No. XLIII.

TO MISS WILHELMINA ALEXANDER.†

MOSSGIEL, 18th November, 1786.

MADAM,

POETS are such outré beings, so much the children of wayward fancy and capricious whim, that I believe the world generally allows them a larger latitude in the rules of propriety, than the sober sons of judgment and prudence. I mention this as an apology for the liberties that a nameless stranger has taken with you in the enclosed poem, which he begs leave to present to you. Whether it has poetical merit any way worthy of the theme, I am not the proper judge: but it is the best my abilities can produce; and what to a good heart will, perhaps, be a superior grace, it is equally sincere as fervent.

The scenery was nearly taken from real life, though I dare say, Madam, you do not recollect it, as I believe you scarcely noticed the poetic *Reveur* as he wandered by you. I had roved out as chance directed, in the favourite haunts of my Muse—the banks of the Ayr—to view nature in all the gaiety of the vernal year. The sun was flaming over the distant western hills; not a breath stirred the crimson opening blossom, or the verdant spreading leaf. It was a golden moment for a poetic heart. I listened to the feathered warblers pouring their harmony on every hand, with a congenial kindred regard, and frequently turned out of my path, lest I should disturb their little songs or frighten them to another station. Surely, said I to myself, he must be a wretch indeed who, regardless of your harmonious endeavour to please him, can eye your elusive flights to discover your secret recesses, and to rob you of all the property Nature gives you—your dearest comforts, your helpless nestlings. Even the hoary hawthorn twig that shot across the way, what heart at such a time but must have been interested in its welfare, and wished it preserved from the rudely-browsing cattle or the withering eastern blast! Such was the scene, and such the hour, when in a corner of my prospect I spied one of the finest pieces of Nature's workmanship that ever crowned a poetic landscape or blest a poet's eye, those visionary bards excepted who hold commerce with aerial beings! Had calumny and villainy taken my walk,

† Enclosing a song inspired by her charms. See LIFE.

they had at that moment sworn eternal peace with such an object.

What an hour of inspiration for a poet! It would have raised plain dull historic prose to metaphor and measure.

The enclosed song was the work of my return home, and perhaps but poorly answers what might have been expected from such a scene. I am going to print a second edition of my Poems, but cannot insert these verses without your permission. I have the honour to be, Madam, your most obedient and very humble servant,

R. B.



WELL, Mr. Burns, and *did* the lady give you the desired permission? No! She was too fine a lady to *notice* so plain a compliment. As to her great brothers, whom I have since met in life on more equal terms of respectability, why should I quarrel their want of attention to me? When Fate swore that their purses should be full, Nature was equally positive that their heads should be empty. Men of their fashion were surely incapable of being unpolite? "Ye canna mak a silk-purse o' a sow's lug."

R. B., 1792.



No. XLIV.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, Esq., BANKER, AYR.*

MOSSGIEL, 20th November, 1786.

SIR,

ENCLOSED you have my first attempt in that irregular kind of measure in which many of our finest odes are wrote. How far I have succeeded I don't know, but I shall be happy to have your opinion on Friday first (24th Nov.), when I intend being in Ayr.

I hear of no returns from Edinburgh to Mr. Aiken respecting my second edition business, so I am thinking to set out beginning of next week for the city myself. If my first poetic patron, Mr. Aiken, is in town, I want to get his advice, both in my procedure and some little criticism affairs much, if business will permit you to honour me with a few minutes when I come down on Friday. I have the honour to be, Sir, your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.

* Enclosing the Poem called "A Winter Night."

No. XLV.

IN THE NAME OF THE NINE, AMEN.

WE, Robert Burns, by virtue of a warrant from Nature, bearing date the twenty fifth of January, Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and fifty-nine,† Poet Laureat and Bard-in-Chief, in and over the districts and countries of Kyle, Cunningham, and Carrick, of old extent, to our trusty and well-beloved William Chalmers and John McAdam, students and practitioners in the ancient and mysterious science of confounding right and wrong.

RIGHT TRUSTY:

Be it known unto You, that whereas in the course of our care and watchings over the order and police of all and sundry the manufacturers, retainers, and venders of poesy; bards, poets, poetasters, rhymers, jinglers, songsters, ballad singers, &c., &c., &c., male and female—We have discovered a certain nefarious, abominable, and wicked song or ballad, a copy whereof we have enclosed; Our Will therefore is, that Ye pitch upon and appoint the most execrable individual of that most execrable species, known by the appellation, phrase, and nick-name of "The Deil's Yell Nowte;"‡ and after having caused him to kindle a fire at the Cross of Ayr, Ye shall, at noontide of the day, put into the said wretch's merciless hands the said copy of the said nefarious and wicked song, to be consumed by fire in the presence of all beholders, in abhorrence of, and terrorem to, all such compositions and composers. And this in nowise leave Ye undone, but have it executed in every point as this Our Mandate bears, before the twenty-fourth current, when in person we hope to applaud your faithfulness and zeal.

Given at Mauchline this twentieth day of November, Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and eighty-six.

GOD SAVE THE BARD!



No. XLVI.

TO MR. GEORGE REID, BARQUHARIE.

EDINBURGH, 29th November, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

JOHN SAMSON begged your pownie in such a manner, seconded by Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield,

† The Poet's birth-day.

‡ "Deil's Yell Nowte:" some suppose this means old bachelors, others that it is a slang name for sheriffs' officers, *et hoc omne genus*. The poem enclosed was "Holy Willie's Prayer."

that I hope you will forgive my not returning it by the carrier.

I left Mr. Prentice's on Monday night. There was a most agreeable little party in the evening; a Mr. Lang, a dainty body of a clergyman; Mr. and Mrs. Stodart—a glorious fellow, with a still more glorious wife, with whom I breakfasted, along with Mr. Prentice, next morning. For Mr. Prentice, no words can do him justice. Sound sterling sense, and plain warm hospitality are truly his.

R. B.



No. XLVII.

TO JAMES DALRYMPLE, Esq. OF ORANGE-FIELD.

30th November, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I SUPPOSE the devil is so elated with his success with you, that he is determined by a *coup de main* to complete his purposes on you all at once, in making you a poet. I broke open the letter you sent me: hummed over the rhymes; and as I saw they were extempore, said to myself, they were very well; but when I saw at the bottom a name I shall ever value with grateful respect, "I gapit wide, but naething spak." I was nearly as much struck as the friends of Job, of affliction-bearing memory, when they sat down with him seven days and seven nights, and spake not a word.

I am naturally of a superstitious cast, and as soon as my wonder-scared imagination regained its consciousness, and resumed its functions, I cast about what this mania of yours might portend. My foreboding ideas had the wide stretch of possibility; and several events, great in their magnitude and important in their consequences, occurred to my fancy. The downfall of the conclave, or the crushing of the Cork rumps; a ducal coronet to Lord George Gordon and the Protestant interest; or St. Peter's keys to . . .

You want to know how I come on. I am just *in statu quo*, or, not to insult a gentleman with my Latin, in "auld use and wout." The noble Earl of Glencairn took me by the hand to-day, and interested himself in my concerns, with a goodness like that benevolent Being whose image he so richly bears. He is a stronger proof of the immortality of the soul than any that philosophy ever produced. A mind like his can never die. Let the worshipful squire, H. L., the reverend Mass J. M., go into their primitive

nothing. At best, they are but ill-digested lumps of chaos—only, one of them strongly tinged with bituminous particles and sulphureous effluvia. But my noble patron, eternal as the heroic swell of magnanimity and the generous throb of benevolence, shall look on with princely eye at "the war of elements, the wreck of matter, and the crash of worlds."

R. B.



No. XLVIII.

TO SIR JOHN WHITEFOORD, BART.*

EDINBURGH, 1st December, 1786.

SIR,

MR. M'KENZIE, in Mauchline, my very warm and worthy friend, has informed me how much you are pleased to interest yourself in my fate as a man, and (what to me is incomparably dearer) my fame as a poet. I have, Sir, in one or two instances, been patronized by those of your character in life, when I was introduced to their notice by social friends to them, and honoured acquaintances to me; but you are the first gentleman in the country whose benevolence and goodness of heart has interested him for me, unsolicited and unknown. I am not master enough of the etiquette of these matters to know, nor did I stay to enquire, whether formal duty bade, or cold propriety disallowed, my thanking you in this manner, as I am convinced, from the light in which you kindly view me, that you will do me the justice to believe this letter is not the manœuvre of the needy, sharpening author, fastening on those in upper life, who honour him with a little notice of him or his works. Indeed, the situation of poets is generally such, to a proverb, as may in some measure palliate that prostitution of heart and talents they have at times been guilty of. I do not think prodigality is, by any means, a necessary concomitant of a poetic turn, but I believe a careless, indolent inattention to economy is almost inseparable from it; then there must be in the heart of every bard of Nature's making a certain modest sensibility, mixed with a kind of pride, which will ever keep him out of the way of those windfalls of fortune, which frequently light on hardy impudence and foot-licking servility. It is not easy to imagine a more helpless state than his whose poetic fancy unfits him for the world, and whose character as a scholar gives him some pretensions to the *politesse* of life—yet is as poor as I am.

* Sir John Whitefoord was an unfortunate Scottish gentleman, proprietor of the estates of Ballochmyle and Whitefoord, Ayrshire, but compelled to live in Edinburgh by misfortune; a warm friend and defender of Burns.

For my part, I thank Heaven my star has been kinder; learning never elevated my ideas above the peasant's shed, and I have an independent fortune at the plough-tail.

I was surprised to hear that any one who pretended in the least to the manners of the gentleman should be so foolish, or worse, as to stoop to traduce the morals of such a one as I am, and so inhumanly cruel, too, as to meddle with that late most unfortunate, unhappy part of my story. With a tear of gratitude I thank you, Sir, for the warmth with which you interposed in behalf of my conduct. I am, I acknowledge, too frequently the sport of whim, caprice, and passion; but reverence to God, and integrity to my fellow-creatures, I hope I shall ever preserve. I have no return, Sir, to make you for your goodness but one—a return which, I am persuaded, will not be unacceptable—the honest warm wishes of a grateful heart for your happiness, and every one of that lovely flock who stand to you in a filial relation. If ever calumny aim the poisoned shaft at them, may friendship be by to ward the blow!

R. B.



No. XLIX.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, Esq., MAUCHLINE.

EDINBURGH, *December 7, 1786.*

HONOURED SIR,

I HAVE paid every attention to your commands, but can only say, what perhaps you will have heard before this reach you, that Muirkirklands* were bought by a John Gordon, W.S., but for whom I know not; Mauchlands, Haugh-Miln, &c., by a Frederick Fotheringham, supposed to be for Ballochmyle Laird; and Adamhill and Shaw-wood were bought for Oswald's folks. This is so imperfect an account, and will be so late ere it reach you, that were it not to discharge my conscience I would not trouble you with it; but after all my diligence I could make it no sooner nor better.

For my own affairs, I am in a fair way of becoming as eminent as Thomas à Kempis or John Bunyan; and you may expect henceforth to see my birth-day inserted among the wonderful events in the Poor Robin's and Aberdeen Almanacks, along with the black Monday, and the battle of Bothwell Bridge. My Lord Glencairn and the Dean of Faculty, Mr. H. Erskine, have taken me under their wing; and by all probability I shall soon

be the tenth worthy, and the eighth wise man, of the world. Through my Lord's influence it is inserted in the records of the Caledonian Hunt, that they universally, one and all, subscribe for the second edition. My subscription bills come out to-morrow, and you shall have some of them next post. I have met, in Mr. Dalrymple, of Orangefield, what Solomon emphatically calls "A friend that sticketh closer than a brother." The warmth with which he interests himself in my affairs is of the same enthusiastic kind which you, Mr. Aiken, and the few patrons that took notice of my earlier poetic days, shewed for the poor unlucky devil of a poet.

I always remember Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Kennedy in my poetic prayers, but *you* both in prose and verse.

May could ne'er catch you but a hap,
Nor hunger but in Plenty's lap!

Amen! R. B.



No. L.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, Esq., BANKER, AYR.

EDINBURGH, *13th December, 1786.*

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

I WOULD not write you till I could have it in my power to give you some account of myself and my matters, which, by the bye, is often no easy task. I arrived here on Tuesday was se'nnight, and have suffered ever since I came to town with a miserable head-ache and stomach complaint, but am now a good deal better. I have found a worthy warm friend in Mr. Dalrymple, of Orangefield, who introduced me to Lord Glencairn, a man whose worth and brotherly kindness to me I shall remember when time will be no more. By his interest it is passed in the "Caledonian Hunt," and entered in their books, that they are to take each a copy of the second edition, for which they are to pay one guinea. I have been introduced to a good many of the *Noblesse*, but my avowed patrons and patronesses are the Duchess of Gordon—the Countess of Glencairn, with my Lord and Lady Betty—the Dean of Faculty—Sir John Whitefoord. I have likewise warm friends among the literati; Professors Stewart, Blair, and Mr. Mackenzie—the Man of Feeling. An unknown hand left ten guineas for the Ayrshire bard in Mr. Sibbald's hands, which I got. I since have discovered my generous unknown friend to be Patrick Miller, Esq., brother to the Justice Clerk; and drank a glass of claret with him, by invitation, at his own

* Lands of the Loudoun family, sold by public roup on December 5, 1786.

house yesternight. I am nearly agreed with Creech to print my book, and I suppose I will begin on Monday. I will send a subscription bill or two next post, when I intend writing my first kind patron, Mr. Aiken. I saw his son to-day, and he is very well.

Dugald Stewart, and some of my learned friends, put me in the periodical paper called *The Lounger*, a copy of which I here enclose you. I was, Sir, when I was first honoured with your notice, too obscure; now I tremble lest I should be ruined by being dragged too suddenly into the glare of polite and learned observation.

I shall certainly, my ever honoured patron, write you an account of my every step; and better health and more spirits may enable me, to make it something better than this stupid matter-of-fact epistle. I have the honour to be, good Sir, your ever most grateful humble servant,

R. B.

If any of my friends write me, my direction is, care of Mr. Creech, bookseller.



No. LI.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR, KILMARNOCK.

EDINBURGH, 15th December, 1786.

MY DEAR SIR,

I DELAYED writing you till I was able to give you some rational account of myself and my affairs. I am got under the patronage of the Duchess of Gordon, Countess Dowager of Glencairn, Sir John Whitefoord, the Dean of Faculty, Professors Blair, Stewart, Greenfield, and several others of the noblesse and literati. I believe I shall begin at Mr. Creech's as my publisher. I am still undetermined as to the future; and, as usual, never think of it. I have now neither house nor home that I can call my own, and live on the world at large. I am just a poor wayfaring pilgrim on the road to Parnassus, a thoughtless wanderer and sojourner in a strange land. I received a very kind letter from Mr. A. Dalziel, for which please return my thanks; and tell him I will write him in a day or two. Mr. Parker, Charles, Dr. Corsan, and honest John, my *quondam* printer, I remember in my prayers when I pray in rhyme. To all of whom, till I have an opportunity [of saluting them in person, present my warmest remembrances.]

No. LII.

TO MR. ROBERT AIKEN, AYR.

EDINBURGH, 16th December, 1786.

DEAR PATRON OF MY VIRGIN MUSE,

I WROTE Mr. Ballantine at large all my operations and "eventful story," since I came to town. I have found in Mr. Creech, who is my agent forsooth, and Mr. Snellie who is to be my printer, that honour and goodness of heart which I always expect in Mr. Aiken's friends. Mr. Dalrymple of Orangefield I shall ever remember: my Lord Glencairn I shall ever pray for. The Maker of man has great honour in the workmanship of his Lordship's heart. May he find that patronage and protection in his guardian angel that I have found in him! His Lordship has sent a parcel of subscription bills to the Marquis of Graham, with downright orders to get them filled up with all the first Scottish names about court. He has likewise wrote to the Duke of Montague, and is about to write to the Duke of Portland, for their Graces' interest in behalf of the Scotch bard's subscription.

You will very probably think, my honoured friend, that a hint about the mischievous nature of intoxicated vanity may not be unseasonable; but, alas! you are wide of the mark. Various concurring circumstances have raised my fame as a poet to a height which I am absolutely certain I have not merits to support; and I look down on the future as I would into the bottomless pit.

You shall have one or two more bills when I have an opportunity of a carrier. I am ever, with the sincerest gratitude, honoured Sir, your most devoted humble servant,

R. B.



LIII.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR, KILMARNOCK.

EDINBURGH, December 20, 1786.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE just time for the earrier, to tell you that I received your letter; of which I shall say no more but what a lass of my acquaintance said of her bastard wean; she said she "did na ken wha was the father exactly, but she suspected it was some o' thae bonnie blackguard smugglers, for it was like them." So I only say your obliging epistle was like you. I enclose you a parcel of subscription bills. Your affair of sixty copies is also like you: but it would not be like me to comply.

Your friend's notion of my life has put a crotchet in my head of sketching it in some future epistle to you. My compliments to Charles and Mr. Parker.

R. B.



No. LIV.

TO MR. WILLIAM CHALMERS, WRITER, AYR.

EDINBURGH, *December 27, 1786.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I CONFESS I have sinned the sin for which there is hardly any forgiveness—ingratitude to friendship—in not writing you sooner; but of all men living, I had intended to have sent you an entertaining letter; and by all the plodding, stupid powers, that in nodding, conceited majesty preside over the dull routine of business—a heavily solemn oath this!—I am, and have been, ever since I came to Edinburgh, as unfit to write a letter of humour, as to write a commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine, who was banished to the Isle of Patmos by the cruel and bloody Domitian, son of Vespasian, and brother to Titus, both emperors of Rome, and who was himself an emperor, and raised the second or third persecution, I forget which, against the Christians, and after throwing the said Apostle John, brother to the Apostle James, commonly called James the Greater, to distinguish him from another James, who was, on some account or other, known by the name of James the Less—after throwing him into a cauldron of boiling oil, from which he was miraculously preserved, he banished the poor son of Zebedee to a desert island in the Archipelago, where he was gifted with the second sight, and saw as many wild beasts as I have seen since I came to Edinburgh; which, a circumstance not very uncommon in story-telling, brings me back to where I set out.

To make you some amends for what, before you reach this paragraph, you will have suffered, I enclose you two poems I have carded and spun since I past Glenbuck. One blank in the Address to Edinburgh—"Fair B—," is heavenly Miss Burnet, daughter to Lord Monboddo, at whose house I had the honour to be more than once. There has not been anything nearly like her in all the combinations of beauty, grace, and goodness, the great Creator has formed since Milton's Eve on the first day of her existence.

I have sent you a parcel of subscription bills, and have written to Mr. Ballantine and Mr. Aiken to call on you for some of them, if they want them. My direction is, care of Andrew Bruce, merchant, Bridge Street.

No. LV.

TO MR. JAMES SIBBALD, BOOKSELLER.

LAWMARKET, 1787.

SIR,

So little am I acquainted with the modes and manners of the more public and polished walks of life, that I often feel myself much embarrassed how to express the feelings of my heart, particularly gratitude.

"Rude am I in speech.

And little blest in the set, polish'd phrase;
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,
Till now—some nine moons wasted—they have used
Their dearest efforts in the rural field;
And therefore, little can I grace my cause
In speaking for myself."

The warmth with which you have befriended an obscure man and young Author in your three last Magazines—I can only say, Sir, I feel the weight of the obligation, and wish I could express my sense of it. In the meantime accept of this conscious acknowledgement from, Sir, your obliged servant,

R. B.



No. LVI.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, Esq.

EDINBURGH, *7th January, 1787.*

. To tell the truth among friends, I feel a miserable blank in my heart, with want of her, and I don't think I shall ever meet with so delicious an awful again. She has her faults; and so have you and I; and so has everybody:

"Their tricks and craft hae put me daft;
They've ta'en me in and a' that;
But clear your decks, and here's "The Sex!"
I like the jads for a' that;
For a' that and a' that,
And twice as muckle's a' that," &c.

I have met with a very pretty girl, a Lothian farmer's daughter, whom I have almost persuaded to accompany me to the west country, should I ever return to settle there. By the by, a Lothian farmer is about an Ayrshire Squire of the lower kind; and I had a most delicious ride from Leith to her house yesternight, in a hackney-coach, with her brother and two sisters, and brother's wife. We

had dined all together at a common friend's house in Leith, and danced, drank, and sang till late enough. The night was dark, the claret had been good, and I thirsty.

R. B.



No. LVII.

TO MR. MACKENZIE, SURGEON, MAUCHLINE.

EDINBURGH, 11th January, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOURS gave me something like the pleasure of an old friend's face. I saw your friend and my honoured patron, Sir John Whitefoord, just after I read your letter, and gave him your respectful compts. He was pleased to say many handsome things of you, which I heard with the more satisfaction, as I knew them to be just.

His son John, who calls very frequently on me, is in a fuss to-day like a coronation. This is the great day—the assembly and ball of the Caledonian Hunt; and John has had the good luck to pre-engage the hand of the beauty-famed and wealth-celebrated Miss McAdam, our countrywoman. Between friends, John is desperately in for it there, and I am afraid will be desperate indeed.

I am sorry to send you the last speech and dying words of *The Lounger*.

A gentleman waited on me yesterday and gave me, by Lord Eglintoun's order, ten guineas by way of subscription for a brace of copies of my 2nd edition.

I met with Lord Maitland and a brother of his to-day at breakfast. They are exceedingly easy, accessible, agreeable fellows, and seemingly pretty clever. I am ever, my dear Sir, yours,

R. B.



No. LVIII.

TO THE EARL OF EGLINTON.*

EDINBURGH, 11th January, 1787.

MY LORD,

As I have but slender pretensions to philosophy, I cannot rise to the exalted ideas of a citizen of the world; but have all those national prejudices, which I believe glow peculiarly strong in the breast of a Scotsman. There is scarcely any thing to which I am so feelingly

alive as the honour and welfare of my country: and as a poet, I have no higher enjoyment than singing her sons and daughters. Fate had cast my station in the veriest shades of life; but never did a heart pant more ardently than mine to be distinguished; though till very lately I looked in vain on every side for a ray of light. It is easy then to guess how much I was gratified with the countenance and approbation of one of my country's most illustrious sons, when Mr. Wauchope called on me yesterday on the part of your Lordship. Your munificence, my Lord, certainly deserves my very grateful acknowledgments; but your patronage is a bounty peculiarly suited to my feelings. I am not master enough of the etiquette of life to know whether there be not some impropriety in troubling your Lordship with my thanks, but my heart whispered me to do it. From the emotions of my inmost soul I do it. Selfish ingratitude I hope I am incapable of; and mercenary servility, I trust, I shall ever have as much honest pride as to detest.

R. B.



No. LIX.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, Esq.

EDINBURGH, 11th January, 1787.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

It gives me a secret comfort to observe in myself that I am not yet so far gone as Willie Gaw's Skate, "past redemption:" for I have still this favourable symptom of grace, that when my conscience, as in the case of this letter, tells me that I am leaving something undone that I ought to do, it teases me eternally till I do it.

I am still "dark as was chaos" in respect to futurity. My generous friend, Mr. Peter Miller, brother to the Justice Clerk, has been talking with me about a lease of some farm or other in an estate called Dalswinton, which he has lately bought, near Dumfries. Some life-rented embittering recollections whisper me that I will be happier any where than in my old neighbourhood, but Mr. Miller is no judge of land; and though I dare say he means to favour me, yet he may give me, in his opinion, an advantageous bargain that may ruin me. I am to take a tour by Dumfries as I return, and have promised to meet Mr. Miller on his lands some time in May.

I went to a mason-lodge yesternight, where the most Worshipful Grand Master, Charteris, and all the Grand Lodge of Scotland visited. The meeting was numerous and elegant; all the different lodges about town were present, in all their pomp.

* Hugh Montgomery. He was twelfth Earl of Eglinton, and died very old in 1819.

The Grand Master, who presided with great solemnity and honour to himself as a gentleman and mason, among other general toasts gave "Caledonia, and Caledonia's Bard, Brother B —," which rung through the whole assembly with multiplied honours and repeated acclamations. As I had no idea such a thing would happen, I was downright thunderstruck, and, trembling in every nerve, made the best return in my power. Just as I had finished, some of the grand officers said, so loud that I could hear, with a most comforting accent, "Very well, indeed!" which set me something to rights again.

I have to-day corrected my 152nd page. My best good wishes to Mr. Aiken. I am ever, dear Sir, your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.



No. LX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, 15th January, 1787.

MADAM,

YOURS of the 9th current, which I am this moment honoured with, is a deep reproach to me for ungrateful neglect. I will tell you the real truth, for I am miserably awkward at a fib. I wished to have written to Dr. Moore before I wrote to you; but though every day since I received yours of December 30th, the idea, the wish to write to him, has constantly pressed on my thoughts, yet I could not for my soul set about it. I know his fame and character, and I am one of "the sons of little men." To write him a mere matter-of-fact affair, like a merchant's order, would be disgracing the little character I have; and to write the author of "The View of Society and Manners" a letter of sentiment—I declare every artery runs cold at the thought. I shall try, however, to write to him to-morrow or next day. His kind interposition in my behalf I have already experienced, as a gentleman waited on me the other day, on the part of Lord Eglintoun, with ten guineas, by way of subscription for two copies of my next edition.

The word you object to in the mention I have made of my glorious countryman and your immortal ancestor, is indeed borrowed from Thomson; but it does not strike me as an improper epithet. I distrusted my own judgment on your finding fault with it, and applied for the opinion of some of the literati here, who honour me with their critical strictures, and they all allow it to be proper. The song you ask I cannot recollect, and I have not a copy of it. I have not composed any thing on the great Wallace,

except what you have seen in print; and the inclosed, which I will print in this edition. You will see I have mentioned some others of the name. When I composed my "Vision" long ago, I had attempted a description of Kyle, of which the additional stanzas are a part as it originally stood. My heart glows with a wish to be able to do justice to the merits of the "Saviour of his Country," which sooner or later I shall at least attempt.

You are afraid I shall grow intoxicated with my prosperity as a poet; alas! Madam, I know myself and the world too well. I do not mean any airs of affected modesty; I am willing to believe that my abilities deserve some notice; but in a most enlightened, informed age and nation, when poetry is and has been the study of men of the first natural genius, aided with all the powers of polite learning, polite books, and polite company—to be dragged forth to the full glare of learned and polite observation, with all my imperfections of awkward rusticity and crude unpolished ideas on my head—I assure you, Madam, I do not dissemble when I tell you I tremble for the consequences. The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised a partial tide of public notice which has borne me to a height, where I am absolutely, feelingly certain, my abilities are inadequate to support me; and too surely do I see that time when the same tide will leave me, and recede perhaps as far below the mark of truth. I do not say this in the ridiculous affectation of self-abasement and modesty. I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy; and however a friend or the world may differ from me in that particular, I stand for my own opinion, in silent resolve, with all the tenaciousness of property. I mention this to you, once for all, to disburthen my mind, and I do not wish to hear or say more about it. But,

"When proud fortune's ebbing tide recedes,"

you will bear me witness, that when my bubble of fame was at the highest, I stood unintoxicated with the inebriating cup in my hand, looking forward with rueful resolve to the hastening time when the blow of calumny should dash it to the ground, with all the eagerness of vengeful triumph.

.

Your patronizing me and interesting yourself in my fame and character as a poet, I rejoice in; it exalts me in my own idea; and whether you can or cannot aid me in my subscription is a trifle. Has a paltry subscription-bill any charms to the heart of a bard, compared with the patronage of the descendant of the immortal Wallace?

R. B.

No. LXI.

TO DR. JOHN MOORE, LONDON.*

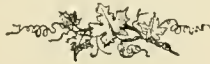
EDINBURGH, 17th January, 1787.

SIR,

MRS. DUNLOP has been so kind as to send me extracts of letters she has had from you, where you do the rustic bard the honour of noticing him and his works. Those who have felt the anxieties and solitudes of authorship can only know what pleasure it gives to be noticed in such a manner, by judges of the first character. Your criticisms, Sir, I receive with reverence; only I am sorry they mostly came too late; a peccant passage or two that I would certainly have altered were gone to the press.

The hope to be admired for ages is, in by far the greatest part of those even who are authors of repute, an unsubstantial dream. For my part, my first ambition was, and still my strongest wish is, to please my contemporaries, the rustic inmates of the hamlet, while ever-changing language and manners shall allow me to be relished and understood. I am very willing to admit that I have some poetical abilities; and as few if any writers, either moral or poetical, are intimately acquainted with the classes of mankind among whom I have chiefly mingled, I may have seen men and manners in a different phasis from what is common, which may assist originality of thought. Still I know very well the novelty of my character has by far the greatest share in the learned and polite notice I have lately had: and in a language where Pope and Churchill have raised the laugh, and Shenstone and Gray drawn the tear; where Thomson and Beattie have painted the landscape, and Lyttelton and Collins described the heart—I am not vain enough to hope for distinguished poetic fame.†

R. B.



No. LXII.

TO THE EARL OF BUCHAN.‡

FEBRUARY, 1787.

MY LORD,

THE honour your Lordship has done me, by your notice and advice in yours of the 1st instant, I shall ever gratefully remember:—

“Praise from thy lips ’tis mine with joy to boast,
They best can give it who deserve it most.”

* See LIFE.

† Dr. Moore answered this letter in a very flattering style, 22rd January.

‡ See LIFE.

Your Lordship touches the darling chord of my heart, when you advise me to fire my Muse at Scottish story and Scottish scenes. I wish for nothing more than to make a leisurely pilgrimage through my native country; to sit and muse on those once hard-contended fields, where Caledonia, rejoicing, saw her bloody Lion borne through broken ranks to victory and fame; and, catching the inspiration, to pour the deathless names in song. But, my Lord, in the midst of these delighting enthusiastic reveries, a long-visaged, dry, moral-looking phantom strides across my imagination, and with the frigid air of a declaiming preacher, sets off with a text of Scripture, thus—

“I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence. Friend, I do not come to open the ill-closed wounds of your follies and misfortunes, merely to give you pain: I wish through these wounds to imprint a lasting lesson on your heart. I will not mention how many of my salutary advices you have despised: I have given you line upon line, and precept upon precept; but while I have been chalking you out the right way to wealth and godly character, you, with audacious effrontery have zigzagged across the path, contemning me to my face: you know the consequences. It is not yet three months since home was so hot for your stay that you were on the wing for the western side of the Atlantic, not to make a fortune, but to hide your disgrace.

“Now that your dear-loved Scotia, about whom you make such a racket, puts it in your power to return to the situation of your forefathers, will you follow these will-o'-wisp meteors of fancy and whim, till they bring you once more to the brink of ruin? I grant that the utmost ground you can occupy is but half a step from Want; but still it is half a step from it. If all that I can say is ineffectual, let her who seldom calls to you in vain, let the call of Pride prevail with you. You know how you feel at the iron grip of ruthless oppression; you know how you bear the galling sneer of contumelious greatness. I tender you the conveniences, the comforts of life, independence and character, on the one hand; I hold you out servility, dependence, and wretchedness, on the other. I will not insult your common sense by bidding you make a choice.”

This, my Lord, is an unanswerable harangue. I must return to my humble station, and woo my rustic Muse in my wonted way at the plough-tail. Still, my Lord, while the drops of life warm my heart, gratitude to that dear-loved country in which I boast my birth, and gratitude to those her distinguished sons, who have honoured me so much with their patronage and approbation, shall, while stealing through my humble shades, ever distend my bosom, and at times draw forth, as now, the swelling tear.

R. B.

No. LXIII.

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN.*

"Oh, where did ye get that haiver meal bannock," &c.†

DEAR CLEGHORN,

You will see by the above that I have added a stanza to "Bonnie Dundee." If you think it will do, you may set it agoing—

"Upon a ten-string'd instrument,
And on the psaltery."

R. B.

To Mr. Cleghorn, farmer. God bless the trade!



No. LXIV.

TO THE REV. GEORGE LAWRIE, NEWMILNS,
NEAR KILMARNOCK.

EDINBURGH, *February 5, 1787.*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

WHEN I look at the date of your kind letter, my heart reproaches me severely with ingratitude in neglecting so long to answer it. I will not trouble you with any account, by way of apology, of my hurried life and distracted attention; do me the justice to believe that my delay by no means proceeded from want of respect. I feel, and ever shall feel for you, the mingled sentiments of esteem for a friend, and reverence for a father.

I thank you, Sir, with all my soul for your friendly hints, though I do not need them so much as my friends are apt to imagine. You are dazzled with newspaper accounts and distant reports; but, in reality, I have no great temptation to be intoxicated with the cup of prosperity. Novelty may attract the attention of mankind awhile; to it I owe my present *éclat*; but I see the time not far distant when the popular tide which has borne me to a height of which I am, perhaps, unworthy, shall recede with silent celerity, and leave me a barren waste of sand, to descend at my leisure to my former station. I do not say this in the affectation of modesty; I see the consequence is unavoidable, and am prepared for it. I had been at a good deal of pains to form a just, impartial estimate of my intellectual powers before I came here; I

* Cleghorn of Saughton Mills, Edinburgh. † See vol. ii. p. 8.

have not added, since I came to Edinburgh, anything to the account; and I trust I shall take every atom of it back to my shades, the coverts of my unnoticed early years.

In Dr. Blacklock, whom I see very often, I have found what I would have expected in our friend—a clear head and an excellent heart.

By far the most agreeable hours I spend in Edinburgh must be placed to the account of Miss Lawrie and her pianoforte. I cannot help repeating to you and Mrs. Lawrie a compliment that Mr. Mackenzie, the celebrated "Man of Feeling," paid to Miss Lawrie the other night at the concert. I had come in at the interlude, and sat down by him till I saw Miss Lawrie in a seat not very far distant, and went up to pay my respects to her. On my return to Mr. Mackenzie he asked me who she was; I told him 'twas the daughter of a reverend friend of mine in the West country. He returned, there was something very striking, to his idea, in her appearance. On my desiring to know what it was, he was pleased to say: "She has a great deal of the elegance of a well-bred lady about her, with all the sweet simplicity of a country girl."

My compliments to all the happy inmates of St. Margaret's. I am, my dear Sir, yours most gratefully,

R. B.



No. LXV.

TO THE HONOURABLE THE BAILIES OF
CANONGATE, EDINBURGH.

6th February, 1787.

GENTLEMEN,

I AM sorry to be told that the remains of Robert Fergusson, the so justly celebrated poet, a man whose talents for ages to come will do honour to our Caledonian name, lie in your church-yard among the ignoble dead, unnoticed and unknown.

Some memorial to direct the steps of the lovers of Scottish song, when they wish to shed a tear over the "narrow house" of the bard who is no more, is surely a tribute due to Fergusson's memory—a tribute I wish to have the honour of paying.

I petition you then, Gentlemen, to permit me to lay a simple stone over his revered ashes, to remain an unalienable property to his deathless fame. I have the honour to be, Gentlemen, your very humble servant,

R. B.

No. LXVI.

TO MR. PETER STUART.*

EDINBURGH, *February*, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

You may think, and too justly, that I am a selfish, ungrateful fellow, having received so many repeated instances of kindness from you, and yet never putting pen to paper to say, thank you; but if you knew what a devil of a life my conscience has led me on that account, your good heart would think yourself too much avenged. By the by, there is nothing, in the whole frame of man, which seems to me so unaccountable as that thing called Conscience. Had the troublesome yelping cur powers efficient to prevent a mischief, he might be of use; but at the beginning of the business, his feeble efforts are to the workings of passion as the infant frosts of an autumnal morning to the unclouded fervour of the rising sun: and no sooner are the tumultuous doings of the wicked deed over, than, amidst the bitter native consequences of folly, in the very vortex of our horrors, up starts Conscience and harrows us with the feelings of the damned.

I have enclosed you, by way of expiation, some verse and prose, that, if they merit a place in your truly entertaining miscellany, you are welcome to. The prose extract is literally as Mr. Sprott sent it me.

The inscription on the stone will be as follows:—

"HERE LIES ROBERT FERGUSSON, POET.

Born, September 5, 1751.—Died, 16th October, 1774.

No sculptur'd marble here, nor pompous lay,

'No storied urn nor animated bust,'

This simple stone directs pale SCOTIA'S way

To pour her sorrows o'er her POET'S dust."

On the other side of the stone will be inscribed:—

"By special grant of the Managers to Robert Burns, who erected this stone, this burial-place is to remain for ever sacred to the memory of Robert Fergusson."

R. B.



No. LXVII.

TO DR. MOORE, LONDON.

EDINBURGH, *15th February*, 1787.

REVERED SIR,

PARDON my seeming neglect in delaying so long to acknowledge the honour you have done me in your

* Editor of the *Star* newspaper, London.

kind notice of me, January 23rd. Not many months ago I knew no other employment than following the plough, nor could boast anything higher than a distant acquaintance with a country clergyman. Mere greatness never embarrasses me; I have nothing to ask from the great, and I do not fear their judgment; but genius, polished by learning, and at its proper point of elevation in the eye of the world, this of late I frequently meet with, and tremble at its approach. I scorn the affectation of seeming modesty to cover self-conceit. That I have some merit I do not deny; but I see with frequent wringings of heart, that the novelty of my character, and the honest national prejudice of my countrymen, have borne me to a height altogether untenable to my abilities.

For the honour Miss Williams has done me, please, Sir, return her in my name my most grateful thanks. I have more than once thought of paying her in kind, but have hitherto quitted the idea in hopeless despondency. I had never before heard of her; but the other day I got her poems, which for several reasons, some belonging to the head, and others the offspring of the heart, give me a great deal of pleasure. I have little pretensions to critic lore; there are, I think, two characteristic features in her poetry—the unfettered wild flight of native genius, and the querulous, *sombre* tenderness of "time-settled sorrow."

I only know what pleases me, often without being able to tell why. †



No. LXVIII.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, Esq., AYR.

EDINBURGH, *24th February*, 1787.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

I WILL soon be with you now "in guid black prent;" in a week or two at farthest. I am obliged, against my own wish, to print subscribers' names; so if any of my Ayr friends have subscription bills, they must be sent in to Creech directly. I am getting my phiz done by an eminent engraver; and if it can be ready in time, I will appear in my book looking, like all other fools, to my title-page. I have the honour to be, ever your grateful,

R. B.

† Dr. Moore also kindly answered th's letter, 28th February, 1787.

No. LXXIX.

TO THE HON. HENRY ERSKINE.*

SIR,

I SHEWED the enclosed political ballad to my Lord Glencairn, to have his opinion whether I should publish it; as I suspect my political tenets, such as they are, may be rather heretical in the opinion of some of my best friends. I have a few first principles in religion and politics, which, I believe, I would not easily part with; but for all the etiquette of, by whom, in what manner, &c., I would not have a dissocial word about it with any one of God's creatures, particularly an honoured patron or a respected friend. His Lordship seems to think the piece may appear in print, but desired me to send you a copy for your suffrage. I am, with the sincerest gratitude for the notice with which you have been pleased to honour the rustie bard, Sir, your most devoted, humble servant,

Two o'clock.

R. B.



No. LXX.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.†

EDINBURGH, *February*, 1787.

MY LORD,

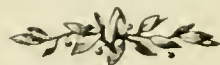
I WANTED to purchase a profile of your Lordship, which I was told was to be got in town; but I am truly sorry to see that a blundering painter has spoiled a "human face divine." The enclosed stanzas I intended to have written below a picture or profile of your Lordship, could I have been so happy as to procure one with any thing of a likeness.

As I will soon return to my shades, I wanted to have something like a material object for my gratitude; I wanted to have it in my power to say to a friend, there is my noble patron, my generous benefactor. Allow me, my Lord, to publish these verses. I conjure your Lordship by the honest thro' of gratitude, by the generous wish of benevolence, by all the powers and feelings which compose the magnanimous mind, do not deny me this petition. I owe much to your Lordship; and, what has not in some other instances always been the case with me, the weight of the obligation is a pleasing load. I trust I have a heart as independent as your Lordship's, than which I can say nothing more; and I would not be beholden to favours that would crucify my feelings. Your

dignified character in life, and manner of supporting that character, are flattering to my pride; and I would be jealous of the purity of my grateful attachment, where I was under the patronage of one of the much favoured sons of fortune.

Almost every poet has celebrated his patrons, particularly when they were names dear to fame, and illustrious in their country; allow me then, my Lord, if you think the verses have intrinsic merit, to tell the world how much I have the honour to be your Lordship's highly indebted and ever grateful, humble servant,

R. B.



No. LXXI.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, Esq.

EDINBURGH, *March* 8, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

YOURS came safe, and I am, as usual, much indebted to your goodness. Poor Captain Montgomery is east. Yesterday it was tried whether the husband could proceed against the unfortunate lover without first divorcing his wife; and their Gravities on the Bench were unanimously of opinion that Maxwell may prosecute for damages directly, and need not divorce his wife at all if he pleases; and Maxwell is immediately, before the Lord Ordinary, to prove, what I dare say will not be denied, the crim-con. Then their Lordships will modify the damages, which I suppose will be pretty heavy, as their Wisdoms have expressed great abhorrence of my gallant right worshipful brother's conduct.

O all ye powers of love unfortunate, and friendless woe! pour the balm of sympathizing pity on the grief-torn, tender heart of the hapless fair one!

My two songs on Miss W. Alexander and Miss Peggy Kennedy were likewise tried yesterday by a jury of literati, and found defamatory libels against the fastidious powers of Poesy and Taste; and the author forbidden to print them under pain of forfeiture of character. I cannot help almost shedding a tear to the memory of two songs that had cost me some pains, and that I valued a good deal; but I must submit.

My most respectful compliments to Mrs. Hamilton, and Miss Kennedy.

My poor unfortunate songs come again across my memory; d—n the pedant, frigid soul of criticism for ever and ever! I am ever, dear Sir, your obliged,

R. B.

* Enclosing fragment—"When Guildford Good." † See LIFE.

No. LXXII.

TO MR. JAMES CANDLISH,*

STUDENT IN PHYSIC, COLLEGE, GLASGOW.

EDINBURGH, *March 21, 1787.*

MY EVER DEAR OLD ACQUAINTANCE,

I WAS equally surprised and pleased at your letter; though I dare say you will think by my delaying so long to write to you, that I am so drowned in the intoxication of good fortune as to be indifferent to old, and once dear connections. The truth is, I was determined to write a good letter, full of argument, amplification, erudition, and, as Bayes says, *all that*. I thought of it, and thought of it, but for my soul, I cannot; and lest you should mistake the cause of my silence, I just sit down to tell you so. Don't give yourself credit though, that the strength of your logic scares me: the truth is, I never mean to meet you on that ground at all. You have shown me one thing which was to be demonstrated; that strong pride of reasoning, with a little affectation of singularity, may mislead the best of hearts. I, likewise, since you and I were first acquainted, in the pride of despising old women's stories, ventured in "the daring path Spinoza trod," but experience of the weakness, not the strength of human powers, made me glad to grasp at revealed religion.

I must stop, but don't impute my brevity to a wrong cause. I am still, in the Apostle Paul's phrase, "the old man with his deeds" as when we were sporting about the lady-thorn. I shall be four weeks here yet, at least; and so I shall expect to hear from you—welcome sense, welcome nonsense. I am, with warmest sincerity, my dear old friend, yours, &c.

R. B.



No. LXXIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, *22nd March, 1787.*

MADAM,

I READ your letter with watery eyes. A little, very little while ago, I had scarce a friend but the stubborn pride of my own bosom; now I am distinguished, patronized, befriended by you. Your friendly advices,

* Mr. Candlish married Miss Smith, one of the Manchline belles, and she became mother to the late Dr. Candlish. Mr. Candlish died in 1806.

I will not give them the cold name of criticisms, I receive with reverence. I have made some small alterations in what I before had printed. I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the literati here, but with them I sometimes find it necessary to claim the privilege of thinking for myself. The noble Earl of Glencairn, to whom I owe more than to any man, does me the honour of giving me his strictures: his hints, with respect to impropriety or indelicacy, I follow implicitly.

You kindly interest yourself in my future views and prospects; there I can give you no light. It is all

"Dark as was Chaos ere the infant sun
Was roll'd together, or had tried his beams
Athwart the gloom profound."

The appellation of a Scottish bard is by far my highest pride; to continue to deserve it is my most exalted ambition. Scottish scenes and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. I have no dearer aim than to have it in my power, unplagued with the routine of business—for which Heaven knows I am unfit enough—to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander on the romantic banks of her rivers; and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, once the honoured abodes of her heroes.

But these are all Utopian thoughts: I have dallied long enough with life; 'tis time to be in earnest. I have a fond, an aged mother to care for: and some other bosom ties perhaps equally tender. Where the individual only suffers by the consequences of his own thoughtlessness, indolence, or folly, he may be excusable: nay, shining abilities, and some of the nobler virtues, may half sanctify a heedless character; but where God and nature have entrusted the welfare of others to his care, where the trust is sacred, and the ties are dear, that man must be far gone in selfishness, or strangely lost to reflection, whom these connections will not rouse to exertion.

I guess that I shall clear between two and three hundred pounds by my authorship; with that sum I intend, so far as I may be said to have any intention, to return to my old acquaintance, the plough, and if I can meet with a lease by which I can live, to commence farmer. I do not intend to give up poetry; being bred to labour, secures me independence, and the Muses are my chief, sometimes have been my only enjoyment. If my practice second my resolution, I shall have principally at heart the serious business of life; but while following my plough, or building up my shocks, I shall cast a leisure glance to that dear, that only feature of my character, which gave me the notice of my country, and the patronage of a Wallace.

Thus, honoured Madam, I have given you the bard, his situation, and his views, native as they are in his own bosom.

R. B.

No. LXXIV.

THE AUTHOR'S EDINBURGH COMMON-PLACE
BOOK.EDINBURGH, *April 9, 1787.*

As I have seen a good deal of human life in Edinburgh, a great many characters which are new to one bred up in the shades of life as I have been, I am determined to take down my remarks on the spot. Gray observes, in a letter to Mr. Palgrave, that "half a word fixed, upon or near the spot, is worth a cart-load of recollection." I don't know how it is with the world in general, but with me, making my remarks is by no means a solitary pleasure. I want some one to laugh with me, some one to be grave with me, some one to please me and help my discrimination, with his or her own remark, and at times, no doubt, to admire my acuteness and penetration. The world are so busied with selfish pursuits, ambition, vanity, interest, or pleasure, that very few think it worth their while to make any observation on what passes around them, except where that observation is a sucker, or branch of the darling plant they are rearing in their fancy. Nor am I sure, notwithstanding all the sentimental flights of novel-writers, and the sage philosophy of moralists, whether we are capable of so intimate and cordial a coalition of friendship, as that one man may pour out his bosom, his every thought and floating fancy, his very inmost soul, with unreserved confidence to another, without hazard of losing part of that respect which man deserves from man; or, from the unavoidable imperfections attending human nature, of one day repenting his confidence.

For these reasons, I am determined to make these pages my confident. I will sketch every character that anyway strikes me, to the best of my power, with unshrinking justice. I will insert anecdotes, and take down remarks, in the old law-phrase, "without fend or favour." Where I hit on anything clever, my own applause will in some measure feast my vanity; and, begging Patroclus' and Achates' pardon, I think a lock and key a security at least equal to the bosom of any friend whatever.

My own private story likewise, my love adventures, my rambles; the frowns and smiles of fortune on my bardship; my poems and fragments, that must never see the light—shall be occasionally inserted. In short, never did four shillings purchase so much friendship, since confidence went first to market, or honesty was set up to sale.

To these seemingly invidious, but too just ideas of human friendship, I would cheerfully make one exception—the connection between two persons of different sexes, when their interests are united and absorbed by the tie of love—

"When thought meets thought, ere from the lips it part,
And each warm wish springs mutual from the heart."

There confidence—confidence that exalts them the more in one another's opinion—that endears them the more to each other's hearts, unreservedly "reigns and revels." But this is not my lot; and in my situation, if I am wise (which, by the bye, I have no great chance of being), my fate should be cast with the Psalmist's sparrow, "to watch alone on the house-tops." Oh the pity!

There are few of the sore evils under the sun give me more uneasiness and chagrin than the comparison how a man of genius, nay, of avowed worth, is received everywhere, with the reception which a mere ordinary character, decorated with the trappings and futile distinctions of fortune, meets. I imagine a man of abilities, his breast glowing with honest pride, conscious that men are born equal, still giving "honour to whom honour is due;" he meets at a great man's table, a Squire Something, or a Sir Somebody; he knows the noble landlord at heart gives the bard, or whatever he is, a share of his good wishes beyond, perhaps, any one at table; yet how will it mortify him to see a fellow whose abilities would scarcely have made an eightpenny tailor, and whose heart is not worth three-farthings, meet with attention and notice that are withheld from the sons of genius and poverty!

The noble Glencairn has wounded me to the soul here, because I dearly esteem, respect, and love him. He shewed so much attention, engrossing attention, one day, to the only blockhead at table (the whole company consisted of his lordship, dumderpate, and myself), that I was within half a point of throwing down my gaze of contemptuous defiance; but he shook my hand and looked so benevolently good at parting. God bless him! though I should never see him more, I shall love him until my dying day! I am pleased to think I am as capable of the throes of gratitude, as I am miserably deficient in some other virtues.

With Dr. Blair I am more at my ease. I never respect him with humble veneration; but when he kindly interests himself in my welfare, or still more, when he descends from his pinnacle, and meets me on equal ground in conversation, my heart overflows with what is called liking. When he neglects me for the mere carcase of greatness, or when his eye measures the difference of our points of elevation, I say to myself, with scarcely any emotion, What do I care for him or his pomp either?

It is not easy forming an exact judgment of any one; but, in my opinion, Dr. Blair is merely an astonishing proof of what industry and application can do. Natural parts like his are frequently to be met with; his vanity is proverbially known among his acquaintance; but he is justly at the head of what may be called fine writing; and

a critic of the first, the very first, rank in prose; even in poetry, a bard of Nature's making can only take the *pas* of him. He has a heart, not of the finest water, but far from being an ordinary one. In short, he is a truly worthy and most respectable character.



No. LXXV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, 15th April, 1787.

MADAM,

THERE is an affectation of gratitude which I dislike. The periods of Johnson and the pauses of Sterne may hide a selfish heart. For my part, Madam, I trust I have too much pride for servility, and too little prudence for selfishness. I have this moment broken open your letter, but

“Rude am I in speech,
And therefore little can I grace the cause,
In speaking of myself;”

so I shall not trouble you with my fine speeches and hunted figures. I shall just lay my hand on my heart, and say, I hope I shall ever have the truest, the warmest sense of your goodness.

I come abroad in print for certain on Wednesday. Your orders I shall punctually attend to; only, by the way, I must tell you that I was paid before for Dr. Moore's and Miss Williams' copies, through the medium of Commissioner Cochrane in this place: but that we can settle when I have the honour of waiting on you.

Dr. Smith was just gone to London the morning before I received your letter to him.

R. B.



No. LXXVI.

TO JOHN BALLANTINE, Esq., AYR.

EDINBURGH, 18th April, 1787.

SIR,

I HAVE taken the liberty to send a hundred copies of my book to your care. . . . I trouble you then, Sir,
VOL. II.

to find a proper person (of the mercantile folks I suppose will be best) that for a moderate consideration will retail the books to subscribers, as they are called for. Several of the subscription bills have been mislaid, so all who say they have subscribed must be served at subscription price; otherwise, those who have not subscribed must pay six shillings. Should more copies be needed, an order by post will be immediately answered.

My respectful compliments to Mr. Aiken. I wrote him by David Shaw, which I hope he received.

I have the honour to be, with the most grateful sincerity,
Sir, your obliged and very humble servant,

R. B.



No. LXXVII.

TO DR. JOHN MOORE, LONDON.

EDINBURGH, 23rd April, 1787.

I RECEIVED the books, and sent the one you mentioned to Mrs. Dunlop. I am ill-skilled in beating the coverts of imagination for metaphors of gratitude. I thank you, Sir, for the honour you have done me; and to my latest hour will warmly remember it. To be highly pleased with your book is what I have in common with the world; but to regard the volumes as a mark of the author's friendly esteem, is a still more supreme gratification.

I leave Edinburgh in the course of ten days or a fortnight, and after a few pilgrimages over some of the classic ground of Caledonia, Cowdenknowes, Banks of Yarrow, Tweed, &c., I shall return to my rural shades, in all likelihood never more to quit them. I have formed many intimacies and friendships here, but I am afraid they are all of too tender a construction to bear carriage a hundred and fifty miles. To the rich, the great, the fashionable, the polite, I have no equivalent to offer; and I am afraid my meteor appearance will by no means entitle me to a settled correspondence with any of you, who are the permanent lights of genius and literature.

My most respectful compliments to Miss Williams. If once this tangent flight of mine were over, and I were returned to my wonted leisurely motion in my old circle, I may probably endeavour to return her poetic compliment in kind.*

R. B.

* Dr. Moore wrote a friendly and flattering reply, dated May 23, 1787.

No. LXXVIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, 30th April, 1787.

. . . . Your criticisms, Madam, I understand very well, and could have wished to have pleased you better. You are right in your guess that I am not very amenable to counsel. Poets, much my superiors, have so flattered those who possessed the adventitious qualities of wealth and power, that I am determined to flatter no created being either in prose or verse.

I set as little by kings, lords, clergy, critics, &c., as all these respective gentry do by my bardship. I know what I may expect from the world by and by—illiberal abuse, and perhaps contemptuous neglect.

I am happy, Madam, that some of my own favourite pieces are distinguished by your particular approbation. For my "Dream," which has unfortunately incurred your loyal displeasure, I hope, in four weeks or less, to have the honour of appearing at Dunlop in its defence, in person.

R. B.



No. LXXIX.

TO MR. WILLIAM DUNBAR, W.S.

LAWNMARKET, Monday Morning, April, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

IN justice to Spenser, I must acknowledge that there is scarcely a poet in the language could have been a more agreeable present to me; and in justice to you, allow me to say, Sir, that I have not met with a man in Edinburgh to whom I would so willingly have been indebted for the gift. The tattered rhymes I herewith present you, and the handsome volumes of Spenser for which I am so much indebted to your goodness, may perhaps be not in proportion to one another; but be that as it may, my gift, though far less valuable, is as sincere a mark of esteem as yours.

The time is approaching when I shall return to my shades; and I am afraid my numerous Edinburgh friendships are of so tender a construction, that they will not bear carriage with me. Yours is one of the few that I could wish of a more robust constitution. It is indeed very probable that when I leave this city, we part never more to meet in this sublunary sphere; but I have a strong fancy that in some future eccentric planet, the comet of happier systems than any with which astronomy is yet acquainted, you and I, among the harum-scarum sons of imagination and whim, with a hearty shake of

a hand, a metaphor, and a laugh, shall recognize old acquaintances:

"Where Wit may sparkle all its rays,
Uncurst with Caution's fears;
And Pleasure, basking in the blaze,
Rejoice for endless years."

I have the honour to be, with the warmest sincerity,
dear Sir, yours ever,

R. B.



No. LXXX.

TO THE REV. DR. HUGH BLAIR.

LAWNMARKET, Edinburgh, 3rd May, 1787.

REV. AND MUCH RESPECTED SIR,

I LEAVE Edinburgh to-morrow morning, but could not go without troubling you with half a line, sincerely to thank you for the kindness, patronage, and friendship you have shewn me. I often felt the embarrassment of my singular situation; drawn forth from the veriest shades of life to the glare of remark; and honoured by the notice of those illustrious names of my country, whose works, while they are applauded to the end of time, will ever instruct and mend the heart. However the meteor-like novelty of my appearance in the world might attract notice, and honour me with the acquaintance of the permanent lights of genius and literature, those who are truly benefactors of the immortal nature of man; I knew very well that my utmost merit was far unequal to the task of preserving that character, when once the novelty was over: I have made up my mind that abuse, or almost even neglect, will not surprise me in my quarters.

I have sent you a proof impression of Beugo's work for me, done on India paper, as a trifling but sincere testimony with what heart-warm gratitude I am, &c.*

R. B.



No. LXXXI.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, MUSIC ENGRAVER,
EDINBURGH.

LAWNMARKET, 4th May, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE sent you a song never before known, for your collection; the air by Mr. McGibbon, but I know

* Dr. Blair responded in a cold but good spirit.

not the author of the words, which I got from Dr. Blacklock.

Farewell, my dear Sir! I wished to have seen you, but I have been decidedly throng, as I march to-morrow.

Had my acquaintance with you been a little older, I would have asked the favour of your correspondence; as I have met with few people whose company and conversation gave me so much pleasure, because I have met with few whose sentiments are so congenial to my own.

When Dunbar and you meet, tell him I left Edinburgh with the idea of him hanging somewhere about my heart.

Keep the original of this song till we meet again, whenever that may be.

R. B.



No. LXXXII.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

LAWNMARKET, *Friday, noon.*

MY LORD,

I go away to-morrow morning early, and allow me to vent the fulness of my heart in thanking your Lordship for all that patronage, that benevolence, and that friendship with which you have honoured me. With brimful eyes, I pray that you may find, in that great Being whose image you so nobly bear, that Friend which I have found in you. My gratitude is not selfish design—that I disdain; it is not dodging after the heel of greatness—that is an offering you disdain. It is a feeling of the same kind with my devotion.

R. B.



No. LXXXIII.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, Esq., LONDON.*

SELKIRK, *13th May, 1787.*

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

THE enclosed I have just wrote, nearly extempore, in a solitary inn in Selkirk, after a miserable wet day's riding. I have been over most of East Lothian, Berwick, Roxburgh, and Selkirk shires, and next week I begin a tour through the north of England. Yesterday I dined with Lady Harriet, sister to my noble patron†—

* Enclosing poem, "Willie's awa." See vol. i. p. 118.

† James, Earl of Glencairn.

Quem Deus conservet! I would write till I would tire you as much with dull prose, as I dare say by this time you are with wretched verse; but I am jaded to death; so, with a grateful farewell, I have the honour to be, good Sir, yours sincerely.

R. B.



No. LXXXIV.

TO MR. PETER HILL,

CARE OF MR. CREECH, BOOKSELLER, EDINBURGH.

May 17, 1787.

DEAR SIR,

IF Mr. Alexander Pattison, or Mr. Cowan from Paisley, or in general, any other of those to whom I have sent copies on credit before, apply to you, you will give them what number they demand, when they require it; provided always that those who are non-subscribers shall pay one shilling more than subscribers. This I write to you when I am miserably "fou," consequently it must be the sentiments of my heart.

R. B.



No. LXXXV.

TO MR. PATTISON, BOOKSELLER, PAISLEY.

BERRYWELL, NEAR DUNSE, *May 17, 1787.*

DEAR SIR,

I AM sorry I was out of Edinburgh, making a slight pilgrimage to the classic scenes of this country, when I was favoured with yours of the 11th instant, enclosing an order of the Paisley Banking Company on the Royal Bank, for twenty-two pounds, seven shillings sterling, payment in full, after carriage deducted, for ninety copies of my book I sent you. According to your motions, I see you will have left Scotland before this reaches you, otherwise I would send you "Holy Willie" with all my heart. I was so hurried that I absolutely forgot several things I ought to have minded, among the rest, sending books to Mr. Cowan; but any order of yours will be answered at Creech's shop. You will please remember that non-subscribers pay six shillings, this is Creech's profit; but those who have subscribed, though their names have been neglected in the printed list, which

is very incorrect, are supplied at the subscription price. I was not at Glasgow, nor do I intend for London; and I think Mrs. Fane is very idle to tell so many lies on a poor poet. When you or Mr. Cowan write for copies, if you should want any, direct to Mr. Hill, at Mr. Creech's shop; and I write to Mr. Hill by this post, to answer either of your orders. Hill is Mr. Creech's first clerk,* and Creech himself is presently in London. I suppose I shall have the pleasure, against your return to Paisley, of assuring you how much I am, dear Sir, your obliged humble servant.

R. B.



No. LXXXVI.

TO MR. WILLIAM NICOL,†

CLASSICAL MASTER, HIGH SCHOOL, EDINBURGH.

CARLISLE, *June 1, 1787.*

KIND, HONEST-HEARTED WILLIE,

I'm sitten down here, after seven and forty miles ridin', e'en as forjesket and forniaw'd as a forfough'en cock, to gie you some notion o' my land-lower-like stragvagnin sen the sorrowful hour that I sheuk hands and parted wi' Auld Reekie.

My auld, ga'd gleyde o' a meere has huehyall'd up hill and down brae, in Scotland and England, as tough and birnie as a vera devil wi' me.‡ It's true, she's as poor's a sangmaker and as hard's a kirk, and tipper-taipers when she taks the gate first, like a lady's gentlewoman in a minuwaie, or a hen on a het girdle; but she's a yauld, pountherie Girran for a' that, and has a stomach like Willie Stalker's meere that wad hae disgeested tumbler-wheels, for she'll whip me aff her five stimparts o' the best aits at a down-sittin' and ne'er fash her thumb. When ance her ringbanes and spavies, her cruicks and cramps, are fairly soupl'd, she beets to, beets to, and aye the hindmost hour the tightest. I could wager her price to a thretty pennies, that, for twa or three weeks ridin'

* Mr. Peter Hill afterwards became a noted bookseller in Edinburgh, under whom Constable was brought up.

† Nicol was an enthusiastic admirer and a great *cronie* of the Poet. He died in 1797.

‡ This mare was the Poet's favourite, Jenny Geddes, named after the woman memorable in Scottish history as the first who displayed a *physical force* opposition to the introduction of episcopacy into Scotland, by flinging her stool at the dean of Edinburgh's head, in St. Giles' Church, July 23, 1637, when he commenced to read the Liturgy, exclaiming at the same time, "Villain! dost thou say the mass at my lug?"

at fifty mile a day, the deil-sticket a five gallopers acquiesh Clyde and Whithorn could cast saut on her tail.

I hae dauder'd owre a' the kintra frae Dunbar to Selcraig, and hae forgather'd wi' mony a guid fallow and monie a weelfar'd lizzie. I met wi' twa dink quines in particular, ane o' them a sounsie, fine, foudel lass, baith braw and bonnie; the tither was a clean-shankit, straught, tight, weelfar'd winch, as blythe's a lintwhite on a flowerie thorn, and as sweet and as modest's a new blawn plumrose in a hazle shaw. They were baith bred to mainers by the beuk, and onie ane o' them had as muckle smeddum and rumblegunition as the half o' some presbytries that you and I baith ken. They play'd me sik a deevil o' a shavie that I daur say if my harigals were turn'd out, ye wad see twa nicks i' the heart o' me like the mark o' a kail-whittle in a castock.

I was gaun to write you a lang pystle, but, Gude forgie me! I gat mysel sae notouriously bitchify'd the day, after kail-time, that I can hardly stoiter but and ben.

My best respects to the guidwife and a' our common friens, especiall Mr. and Mrs. Cruikshank and the honest guidman o' Jock's Lodge.

I'll be in Dumfries the morn gif the beast be to the fore, and the branks bide hale. Gude be wi' you, Willie! Amen!

R. B.



No. LXXXVII.

TO MR. JAMES SMITH,§

AT MILLER AND SMITH'S OFFICE, LINLITHGOW.

MAUCHLINE, *11th June, 1787.*

MY EVER DEAR SIR,

I DATE this from Mauchline, where I arrived on Friday even last. I slept at John Dow's, and called for my daughter; Mr. Hamilton and family; your mother, sister, and brother; my quondam Eliza, &c., all, all well. If any thing had been wanting to disgust me completely at Armour's family, their mean, servile compliance would have done it.

Give me a spirit like my favourite hero, Milton's Satan:

“Hail, horrors! hail,

infernal world! and thou, profoundest hell,

Receive thy new possessor! one who brings

A mind not to be chang'd by place or time!”

I cannot settle to my mind. Farming, the only thing of which I know anything, and Heaven above knows, but little do I understand of that, I cannot, dare not risk on

§ To whom Burns addressed his famous “Epistle to James Smith.”

farms as they are. If I do not fix, I will go for Jamaica. Should I stay in an unsettled state at home, I would only dissipate my little fortune, and ruin what I intend shall compensate my little ones, for the stigma I have brought on their names.

I shall write you more at length soon; as this letter costs you no postage, if it be worth reading you cannot complain of your penny-worth. I am ever, my dear Sir, yours,
R. B.

P.S.—The cloot has unfortunately broke, but I have provided a fine buffalo-horn, on which I am going to affix the same cypher which you will remember was on the lid of the cloot.*



No. LXXXVIII.

TO MR. WILLIAM NICOL, EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 18th June, 1787.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM now arrived safe in my native country, after a very agreeable jaunt, and have the pleasure to find all my friends well. I breakfasted with your grey-headed, reverend friend, Mr. Smith; and was highly pleased both with the cordial welcome he gave me, and his most excellent appearance and sterling good sense.

I have been with Mr. Miller at Dalswinton, and am to meet him again in August. From my view of the lands and his reception of my bardship, my hopes in that business are rather mended; but still they are but slender.

I am quite charmed with Dumfries folks. Mr. Burnside, the clergyman, in particular, is a man whom I shall ever gratefully remember; and his wife, gude forgie me! I had almost broke the tenth commandment on her account. Simplicity, elegance, good sense, sweetness of disposition, good humour, kind hospitality, are the constituents of her manner and heart; in short—but if I say one word more about her, I shall be directly in love with her.

I never, my friend, thought mankind very capable of anything generous; but the stateliness of the patricians in Edinburgh, and the servility of my plebeian brethren (who perhaps formerly eyed me askance) since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species. I have bought a pocket Milton, which I carry perpetually about with me, in order to study the sentiments—the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid,

* Referring to a snuff-box made of a sheep's hoof.

unyielding, independence, the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great personage, SATAN. 'Tis true, I have just now a little cash; but I am afraid the star that hitherto has shed its malignant, purpose-blasting rays full in my zenith—that noxious planet so baneful in its influences to the rhyming tribe—I much dread it is not yet beneath my horizon. Misfortune dodges the path of human life; the poetic mind finds itself miserably deranged in, and unfit for, the walks of business; add to all, that thoughtless follies and hare-brained whims, like so many *ignes fatui*, eternally diverging from the right line of sober discretion, sparkle with step-bewitching blaze in the idly-gazing eyes of the poor heedless bard, till pop, “he falls, like Lucifer, never to hope again.” God grant this may be an unreal picture with respect to me; but should it not, I have very little dependence on mankind. I will close my letter with this tribute my heart bids me pay you—the many ties of acquaintance and friendship which I have, or think I have, in life, I have felt along the lines, and, damn them, they are almost all of them of such frail texture, that I am sure they would not stand the breath of the least adverse breeze of fortune; but from you, my ever dear Sir, I look with confidence for the apostolic love that shall wait on me “through good report and bad report”—the love which Solomon emphatically says “is strong as death.” My compliments to Mrs. Nicol, and all the circle of our common friends.

R. B.

P.S.—I shall be in Edinburgh about the latter end of July.



No. LXXXIX.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE,† EDINBURGH.

ARROCHAR, NEAR CROCHAIRBAS, BY LOCH LONG,
June 28, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I WRITE you this on my tour through a country where savage streams tumble over savage mountains, thinly overspread with savage flocks, which starvingly support as savage inhabitants. My last stage was Inverary—to-morrow night's stage, Dumbarton. I ought sooner to have answered your kind letter, but you know I am a man of many sins.‡

R. B.

† See LIFE. ‡ This letter refers to Burns' West Highland Tour.

No. XC.

TO MR. JAMES SMITH, LINLITHGOW.

June 30, 1787.

ON our return, at a Highland gentleman's hospitable mansion, we fell in with a merry party, and danced till the ladies left us, at three in the morning. Our dancing was none of the French or English insipid formal movements; the ladies sung Scotch songs like angels, at intervals; then we flew at Bab at the Bowster, Tullochgorum, Loch Errochside,* &c., like midges sporting in the mottie sun, or crows prognosticating a storm in a hairst day. When the dear lasses left us, we ranged round the bowl till the good-fellow hour of six; except a few minutes that we went out to pay our devotions to the glorious lamp of day peering over the towering top of Benlomond. We all kneeled; our worthy landlord's son held the bowl; each man a full glass in his hand, and I, as priest, repeated some rhyming nonsense, like Thomas-a-Rhymer's prophecies I suppose. After a small refreshment of the gifts of Somnus, we proceeded to spend the day on Lochlomond, and reach Dumbarton in the evening. We dined at another good fellow's house, and consequently push'd the bottle: when we went out to mount our horses, we found ourselves "No verra fou but gaylie yet." My two friends and I rode soberly down the Loch side, till by came a Highlandman at the gallop, on a tolerably good horse, but which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather. We scorned to be out-galloped by a Highlandman, so off we started, whip and spur. My companions, though seemingly gayly mounted, fell sadly astern; but my old mare, Jenny Geddes, one of the Rosinante family, she strained past the Highlandman in spite of all his efforts with the hair halter: just as I was passing him, Donald wheeled his horse as if to cross before me to mar my progress, when down came his horse, and threw his rider's breechless a—e in a clipt hedge; and down came Jenny Geddes over all, and my hardship between her and the Highlandman's horse. Jenny Geddes trod over me with such cautious reverence that matters were not so bad as might well have been expected; so I came off with a few cuts and bruises, and a thorough resolution to be a pattern of sobriety for the future.

I have yet fixed on nothing with respect to the serious business of life. I am, just as usual, a rhyming, mason-making, rattling, aimless, idle fellow. However, I shall somewhere have a farm soon. I was going to say a wife too; but that must never be my blessed lot. I am but a younger son of Parnassus, and like other younger sons of

great families, I may intrigue if I choose to run all risks, but must not marry.

I am afraid I have almost ruined one source, the principal one, indeed, of my former happiness—that eternal propensity I always had to fall in love. My heart no more glows with feverish raptures, I have no paradisaical evening interviews, stolen from the restless cares and prying inhabitants of this weary world. I have only This last is one of your distant acquaintances, has a fine figure, and elegant manners; and, in the train of some great folks whom you know, has seen the politest quarters in Europe. I do like her a good deal; but what piques me is her conduct at the commencement of our acquaintance. I frequently visited her when I was in ———, and after passing regularly the intermediate degrees between the distant formal bow and the familiar grasp round the waist, I ventured, in my careless way, to talk of friendship in rather ambiguous terms; and after her return to ———, I wrote to her in the same style. Miss, construing my words farther than even I intended, flew off in a tangent of female dignity and reserve, like a mounting lark in an April morning; and wrote me an answer which measured me out very completely, what an immense way I had to travel before I could reach the climate of her favour. But I am an old hawk at the sport, and wrote her such a cool, deliberate, prudent reply, as brought my bird from her aerial towerings, pop, down at my foot, like Corporal Trim's hat.

As for the rest of my acts, and my wars, and all my wise sayings, and why my mare was called Jenny Geddes; they shall be recorded in a few weeks hence at Linlithgow, in the chronicles of your memory, by

R. B.



No. XCI.

TO MR. JOHN RICHMOND, EDINBURGH.

MOSSGIEL, 7th July, 1787.

MY DEAR RICHMOND,

I AM all impatience to hear of your fate since the old confounder of right and wrong has turned you out of place, by his journey to answer his indictment at the bar of the other world. He will find the practice of the court so different from the practice in which he has for so many years been thoroughly hackneyed, that his friends, if he had any connections truly of that kind, which I rather doubt, may well tremble for his sake. His chicane, his left-handed wisdom, which stood so firmly by him to such good purpose here, like other accomplices in robbery and plunder, will, now the piratical business is blown, in

* Scotch tunes.

all probability turn king's evidence, and then the devil's bagpiper will touch him off "Bundle and go!"

If he has left you any legacy, I beg your pardon for all this; if not, I know you will swear to every word I said about him.

I have lately been rambling over by Dumbarton and Inverary, and running a drunken race on the side of Loch Lomond with a wild Highlandman: his horse, which had never known the ornaments of iron and leather, zigzagged across before my old spavin'd hunter, whose name is Jenny Geddes, and down came the Highlandman, horse and all, and down came Jenny and my bardship; so I have got such a skinful of bruises and wounds, that I shall be at least four weeks before I dare venture on my journey to Edinburgh.

Not one new thing under the sun has happened in Mauchline since you left it. I hope this will find you as comfortably situated as formerly, or, if Heaven pleases, more so; but, at all events, I trust you will let me know of course how matters stand with you, well or ill. 'Tis but poor consolation to tell the world when matters go wrong; but you know very well your connection and mine stands on a different footing. I am ever, my dear friend, yours,

R. B.



No. XCII.

TO ROBERT AIKEN, Esq., AYR.

WITH COPY OF ELEGY FOR SIR JAMES HUNTER BLAIR.

MAUCHLINE, 14th July, 1787.

MY HONOURED FRIEND,

THE melancholy occasion of the foregoing poem affects not only individuals but a country. That I have lost a friend, is but repeating after Caledonia. This copy, rather an incorrect one, I beg you will accept, till I have an opportunity in person, which I expect to have on Tuesday first, of assuring you how sincerely I ever am, honoured Sir, your oft obliged,

R. B.

MR. HAMILTON'S OFFICE
Saturday Evening.



No. XCIII.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE, JUNR.

MAUCHLINE, 23rd July, 1787.

MY DEAR AINSLIE,

THERE is one thing for which I set great store by you as a friend, and it is this—that I have not a friend upon earth, besides yourself, to whom I can talk nonsense

without forfeiting some degree of his esteem. Now, to one like me, who never cares for speaking anything else but nonsense, such a friend as you is an invaluable treasure. I was never a rogue, but have been a fool all my life; and, in spite of all my endeavours, I see now plainly that I shall never be wise. Now it rejoices my heart to have met with such a fellow as you, who, though you are not just such a hopeless fool as I, yet I trust you will never listen so much to the temptations of the devil, as to grow so very wise that you will in the least disrespect an honest fellow because he is a fool. In short, I have set you down as the staff of my old age, when the whole list of my friends will, after a decent share of pity, have forgot me.

" Though in the morn come sturt and strife
Yet joy may come at noon;
And I hope to live a merry, merry life
When a' thir days are done."

Write me soon, were it but a few lines just to tell me how that good sagacious man, your father, is—that kind, dainty body your mother—that strapping chield your brother Douglas—and my friend Rachel,* who is as far before Rachel of old, as she was before her blear-eyed sister Leah.

R. B.



No. XCIV.

TO DR. MOORE.

MAUCHLINE, 2nd August, 1787.

SIR,

FOR some time past I have been rambling over the country, partly on account of some little business I have to settle in various places; but of late I have been confined with some lingering complaints, originating, as I take it, in the stomach. To divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of *ennui*, I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself.

My name has made a small noise in the country; you have done me the honour to interest yourself very warmly in my behalf; and I think a faithful account of what character of a man I am, and how I came by that character, may perhaps amuse you in an idle moment. I will give you an honest narrative, though I know it will be at the expence of frequently being laugh'd at; for I assure you, Sir, I have, like Solomon, whose character, except in the trifling affair of Wisdom, I sometimes think I resemble—I have, I say, like him "turned my eyes to behold madness and folly," and like him, too frequently

* Rachel Ainslie, Robert Ainslie's sister.

shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship. In the very polite letter Miss Williams did me the honour to write me, she tells me you have got a complaint in your eyes. I pray God it may be removed; for, considering that lady and you are my common friends, you will probably employ her to read this letter, and then good-night to that esteem with which she was pleased to honour the Scotch Bard!

After you have perused these pages, should you think them trifling and impertinent, I only beg leave to tell you, that the poor author wrote them under some very twitching qualms of conscience, that, perhaps, he was doing what he ought not to do; a predicament he has more than once been in before.

I have not the most distant pretence to what the pye-coated guardians of Escutcheons call a Gentleman. When at Edinburgh last winter, I got acquainted at the Herald's Office; and, looking through the granary of honours, I there found almost every name in the kingdom; but for me—

" My ancient but ignoble blood,
Has crept thro' scoundrels ever since the flood."

Gules, purple, argent, &c., quite disowned me. My forefathers rented land of the famous, noble Keiths of Marshal, and had the honour to share their fate. I do not use the word "honour" with any reference to political principles: loyal and disloyal I take to be merely relative terms in that ancient and formidable court known in this country by the name of "club-law." Those who dare welcome ruin and shake hands with infamy, for what they believe sincerely to be the cause of their God or their king, are—as Mark Antony in "Shakspeare" says of Brutus and Cassius—"honourable men." I mention this circumstance because it threw my father on the world at large; where, after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my pretensions to Wisdom. I have met with few who understood men, their manners and their ways, equal to him; but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances; consequently, I was born a very poor man's son.

For the first six or seven years of my life my father was gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had my father continued in that situation, I must have marched off to have been one of the little underlings about a farmhouse; but it was his dearest wish and prayer to have it in his power to keep his children under his own eye, till they could discern between good and evil; so, with the assistance of his generous master, he ventured on a small farm in that gentleman's estate. At these years, I was by no means a favourite with anybody. I was a good deal noted for

a retentive memory, a stubborn, sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiot-piety. I say "idiot-piety," because I was then but a child. Though I cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar; and against the years of ten or eleven, I was absolutely a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my infant and boyish days, too, I owed much to an old maid of my mother's, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country, of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantrips, enchanted towers, giants, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of Poesy, but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical in these matters than I, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest thing of composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was "The Vision of Mirza," and a hymn of Addison's, beginning "How are thy servants blest, O Lord!" I particularly remember one half-stanza which was music to my boyish ears—

" For though in dreadful whirls we hung
High on the broken wave;"

I met with these pieces in Mason's English Collection, one of my school-books. The first two books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read again, were "The Life of Hannibal," and "The History of Sir William Wallace." Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough that I might be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins, which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.

Polemical Divinity about this time was putting the country half-mad, and I, ambitious of shining on Sundays, between sermons, in conversation parties, at funerals, &c., in a few years more, used to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour.

My vicinity to Ayr was of great advantage to me. My social disposition, when not checked by some modification of spirited pride, like our Catechism's definition of Infinity, was "without bounds or limits." I formed many connections with other youngsters who possessed superior advantages; the youngling actors who were busy with the rehearsal of parts, in which they were shortly to appear on that stage where, alas! I was destined to drudge behind the scenes. It is not commonly at these green years that the young noblesse and gentry have a just sense of the

immense distance between them and their ragged play-fellows. It takes a few dashes into the world, to give the young Great Man that proper, decent, unnoticing disregard for the poor, insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him, who perhaps were born in the same village. My young superiors never insulted the cloutery appearance of my plough-boy carcase, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books; among them, even then, I could pick up some observations, and one, whose heart I am sure not even the "Mummy Begum's" scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these my young friends and benefactors, as they dropped off for East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction; but I was soon called to more serious evils. My father's generous master died; the farm proved a ruinous bargain; and to clench the curse, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of "The Twa Dogs."* My father was advanced in life when he married: I was the eldest of seven children, and he, worn out by early hardship, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these, we retrenched expenses. We lived very poorly: I was a dexterous ploughman for my years, and the next eldest to me was a brother, who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash. A novel-writer might perhaps have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the threatening, insolent epistles from the scoundrel tyrant, which used to set us all in tears.

This kind of life—the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing toil of a galley-slave—brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and a woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn, my partner was a bewitching creature who just counted an autumn less. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scotch idiom: she was a "bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass." In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me into a certain delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and bookworm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our chiefest pleasure here below. How she caught the contagion I can't say; you medical folks talk much of infection by breathing the same air, the touch, &c.; but I never expressly told her that I loved her. Indeed, I did not well know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours;

why the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan, when I looked and fingered over her hand to pick out the nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualifications, she sung sweetly; and 'twas her favourite Scotch reel that I attempted to give an embodied vehicle to in rhyme. I was not so presumptive as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he: for, excepting smearing sheep, and casting peats (his father living in the moors), he had no more scholar-craft than I had. Thus with me began love and poesy; which at times have been my only, and till within this last twelve months, have been my highest enjoyment.

My father struggled on till he reached a freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles farther in the country. The nature of the bargain was such as to throw a little ready money in his hand at the commencement, otherwise the affair would have been impracticable. For four years we lived comfortably here; but a lawsuit between him and his landlord commencing, after three years' tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from absorption in a jail by a phthisical consumption, which, after two years' promises, kindly stepped in, and snatched him away to "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest."

It is during this climacteric that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps the most ungainly, awkward being in the parish. No *solitaire* was less acquainted with the ways of the world. My knowledge of ancient story was gathered from Guthrie's and Salmon's Geographical Grammar; my knowledge of modern manners, and of literature and criticism, I got from the *Spectator*. These, with Pope's Works, some Plays of Shakspeare, Tull and Dickson on Agriculture, The Pantheon, Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, Stackhouse's History of the Bible, Justice's British Gardener, Boyle's Lectures, Allan Ramsay's Works, Doctor Taylor's Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin, a Select Collection of English Songs, and Hervey's Meditations, had been the extent of my reading.† The collection of songs was my *vade mecum*. I pored over them, driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the tender or sublime from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe much to this for my critic-craft, such as it is.

† According to the recollection of Mrs. Begg, the poet's youngest sister, he possessed a copy of Ramsay's *Tea Table Miscellany*.

In my seventeenth year, to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school. My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these meetings, and my going was, what to this hour I repent, in absolute defiance of his commands. My father, as I said before, was the sport of strong passions; from that instance of rebellion he took a kind of dislike to me,* which, I believe, was one cause of that dissipation which marked my future years. I say dissipation, comparative with the strictness and sobriety of Presbyterian country life; for though the Will-O'-Wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path, yet, early ingrained piety and virtue never failed to point me out the line of innocence. The great misfortune of my life was never to have an aim. I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labour. The only two doors by which I could enter the fields of fortune were—the most niggardly economy, or the little chicaning art of bargain-making. The first is so contracted an aperture, I never could squeeze myself into it: the last—I always hated the contamination of its threshold! Thus abandoned of view or aim in life, with a strong appetite for sociability (as well from native hilarity as from a pride of observation and remark), and a constitutional hypochondriac taint which made me fly solitude: add to all these incentives to social life—my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense, made me generally a welcome guest. So 'tis no great wonder that always, "where two or three were met together, there was I in the midst of them." But far beyond all the other impulses of my heart, was *un penchant à l'adorable moitié du genre humain*. My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some Goddess or other; and, like every warfare in this world, I was sometimes crowned with success, and sometimes mortified with defeat. At the plough, saythe, or reap-hook, I feared no competitor, and set want at defiance; and as I never cared farther for any labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evening in the way after my own heart. A country lad seldom carries on an amour without an assisting confidant. I possessed a curiosity, zeal, and intrepid dexterity in these matters which recommended me as a proper second in duels of that kind; and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure at being in the secret of half the amours in the parish, as ever did Premier at knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe.

The very goose-feather in my hand seems instinctively

* He was anxious about his son, as he feared the contamination of his morals; but he did not dislike him.

to know the well-worn path of my imagination, the favourite theme of my song, and is with difficulty restrained from giving you a couple of paragraphs on the amours of my compeers, the humble inmates of the farmhouse and cottage: but the grave sons of science, ambition, or avarice baptize these things by the name of follies. To the sons and daughters of labour and poverty they are matters of the most serious nature: to them the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious part of their enjoyments.

Another circumstance in my life which made very considerable alterations on my mind and manners was—I spent my seventeenth summer a good distance from home, at a noted school on a smuggling coast, to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, &c., in which I made a pretty good progress. But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at this time very successful: scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were as yet new to me, and I was no enemy to social life. Here, though I learnt to look unconcernedly on a large tavern-bill, and mix without fear in a drunken squabble, yet I went on with a high hand in my geometry, till the sun entered Virgo, a month which is always a carnival in my bosom: a charming *Fillette*, who lived next door to the school, overset my trigonometry, and set me off in a tangent from the spheres of my studies. I struggled on with my sines and co-sines for a few days more; but stepping out to the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude, I met with my angel—

"Like Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower —."

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I staid I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her, or steal out to meet with her; and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin, I was innocent.

I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's Works: I had seen mankind in a new phasis; and I engaged several of my school-fellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and I pored over them most devoutly. I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me, and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far, that though I had not three, farthings' worth of business in the world, yet every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a board-plodding son of day-book and ledger.

My life flowed on much in the same tenor till my twenty-third year. *Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle*,

were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; Sterne and Mackenzie—"Tristram Shandy" and the "Man of Feeling"—were my bosom favourites.

Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind, but 'twas only the humour of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or other as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed it as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once they were lighted up, raged like so many devils till they got vent in rhyme; and then conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet! None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except "Winter, a dirge"* (the eldest of my printed pieces), "The Death and dying words of poor Mailie,"† "John Barleycorn,"‡ and Songs first, and second, and third. Song second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school-business.

My twenty-third year was to me an important era. Partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined with a flax-dresser in a neighbouring country town, to learn his trade, and carry on the business of manufacturing and retailing flax. This turned out a sadly unlucky affair. My partner was a scoundrel of the first water, who made money by the mystery of thieving; and to finish the whole, while we were giving a welcome carousal to the New Year, our shop, by the drunken carelessness of my partner's wife, took fire and burned to ashes, and I was left, like a true poet, not worth sixpence. I was obliged to give up business; the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round my father's head; the darkest of which was—he was visibly far gone in a consumption. To crown all, a *belle fille* whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the fields of matrimony, jilted me, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file, was my hypochondriac complaint being irritated to such a degree, that for three months I was in a diseased state of body and mind, scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have just got their sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed!" &c.

From this adventure I learned something of a town life; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn was—I formed a bosom friendship with a young fellow, the *first* created being I had ever seen, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a plain mechanic; but a great man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view to bettering his situation in life. The patron dying, and leaving my friend unprovided for, just as he was ready to launch forth into the world, the poor fellow, in despair, went to sea; where, after a variety of good and bad

fortune, he was, a little before I was acquainted with him, set a-shore by an American privateer, on the wild coast of Connaught, stript of everything. I cannot quit this poor fellow's story without adding, that he is at this moment captain of a large West-Indiaman belonging to the Thames.

This gentleman's mind was fraught with courage, independence, and magnanimity, and every noble, manly virtue. I loved him, I admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and I strove to imitate him. I in some measure succeeded; I had the pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself when woman was the presiding star; but he spoke of a certain fashionable failing with levity, which hitherto I had regarded with horror. Here his friendship did me a mischief, and the consequence was that soon after I resumed the plough, I wrote the enclosed "Welcome." §

My reading was only increased by two stray volumes of Pamela, and one of Ferdinand Count Fathom, which gave me some idea of novels. Rhyme, except some religious pieces which are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's Scotch Poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding, rustic lyre with emulating vigour. When my father died his all went among the rapacious hell-hounds that growl in the kennel of justice; but we made a shift to scrape a little money in the family amongst us, with which (to keep us together) my brother and I took a neighbouring farm. My brother wanted my hare-brained imagination, as well as my social and amorous madness; but in good sense, and every sober qualification, he was far my superior.

I entered on this farm with a full resolution "Come, go to, I will be wise!" I read farming books, I calculated crops, I attended markets, and in short, in spite of the devil, the world, and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying in bad seed; the second, from a late harvest, we lost half of both our crops. This overset all my wisdom, and I returned, "like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." I now began to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two Reverend Calvinists, both of them *dramatis personæ* in my "Holy Fair." I had an idea myself that the piece had some merits; but, to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend who was very fond of these things, and told him I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain side of both clergy and laity, it met with a roar of applause.

* See vol. i. p. 8. † See vol. i. p. 13. ‡ See vol. i. p. 13.

§ See vol. i. p. 22.

"Holy Willie's Prayer" next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held three several meetings to look over their holy artillery, if any of it was pointed against profane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my idle wanderings led me on another side, point-blank, within reach of their heaviest metal. This is the unfortunate story alluded to in my printed poem, "The Lament." 'Twas a shocking affair, which I cannot yet bear to recollect, and it had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart, and mistaken the reckoning, of rationality. I gave up my part of the farm to my brother; as in truth it was only nominally mine (for stock I had none to embark in it), and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica. Before leaving my native country, however, I resolved to publish my poems. I weighed my productions as impartially as in my power; I thought they had merit; and 'twas a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears—a poor negro-driver, or perhaps gone to the world of spirits, a victim to that inhospitable clime. I can truly say, that *pauvre inconnu* as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and my works as I have at this moment. It was ever my opinion that the great, unhappy mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance or mistaken notions of themselves. To know myself had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself, alone; I balanced myself with others; I watched every means of information, how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet: I studied assiduously Nature's design, where she seemed to have intended the various lights and shades in my character. I was pretty sure my poems would meet with some applause; but at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West Indian scenes would make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty. My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; besides pocketing (all expenses deducted) near twenty pounds. This last came very seasonably, as I was about to indent myself, for want of money to pay my freight. So soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the Torrid Zone, I bespoke a passage in the very first ship that was to sail, for

"Hungry ruin had me in the wind."

I had for some time been skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised, ungrateful people had uncoupled the merciless legal pack at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had

composed a song, "The gloomy night is gathering fast," which was to be the last effort of my muse in Caledonia, when a letter from Dr. Blacklock to a friend of mine overthrew all my schemes, by rousing my poetic ambition. The Doctor belonged to a class of critics for whose applause I had not even dared to hope. His idea, that I would meet with every encouragement for a second edition, fired me so much that away I posted for Edinburgh without a single acquaintance in town, or a single letter of recommendation in my pocket. The baneful star that had so long presided in my Zenith, for once made a revolution to the Nadir; and the providential care of a good God placed me under the patronage of one of his noblest creatures, the Earl of Glencairn. "*Oubliez moi, grand Dieu, si jamais je l'oublie!*"

I need relate no farther. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to "catch the manners living as they rise."

You can now, Sir, form a pretty near guess of what sort of a wight he is, whom for some time you have honoured with your correspondence. That whim and fancy, keen sensibility and riotous passions, may still make him zig-zag in his future path of life, is very probable; but, come what will, I shall answer for him—the most determinate integrity and honour. . . . And though his evil star should again blaze in his meridian with tenfold more direful influence, he may reluctantly tax friendship with pity, but no more.

My most respectful compliments to Miss Williams. The very elegant and friendly letter she honoured me with a few days ago, I cannot answer at present, as my presence is required in Edinburgh for a week or so, and I set off to-morrow.

I enclose you "Holy Willie" for the sake of giving you a little further information of the affair than Mr. Creech could do. An Elegy I composed the other day on Sir James H. Blair, if time allow, I will transcribe. The merit is just mediocre.

If you will oblige me so highly and do me so much honour as now and then to drop me a line, please direct to me at Mauchline, Ayrshire. With the most grateful respect, I have the honour to be, Sir, your very humble servant,

R. B.



No. XCV.

TO MR. ARCHIBALD LAWRIE.

MY DEAR SIR, EDINBURGH, 14th August, 1787.

HERE am I—that is all I can tell you of that unaccountable being myself. What I am doing no mortal

can tell ; what I am thinking I myself cannot tell ; what I am usually saying is not worth telling. The clock is just striking one, two, three, four, —, —, —, —, —, —, twelve, forenoon ; and here I sit in the attic story, *alias* the garret, with a friend on the right hand of my standish—a friend whose kindness I shall largely experience at the close of this line—there—thank you—a friend, my dear Mr. Lawrie, whose kindness often makes me blush ; a friend who has more of the milk of human kindness than all the human race put together, and what is highly to his honour, peculiarly a friend to the friendless as often as they come in his way ; in short, Sir, he is, without the least alloy, a universal philanthropist ; and his much beloved name is—a bottle of good old Port ! In a week, if whim and weather serve, I shall set out for the north—a tour to the Highlands.

I ate some Newhaven broth, in other words, boiled mussels, with Mr. Farquhar's family, t'other day. Now I see you prick up your ears. They are all well, and Mademoiselle is particularly well. She begs her respects to you all ; along with which please present those of your humble servant. I can no more. I have so high a veneration, or rather idolatry, for the clerical character, that even a little *futurum esse vel fuisse Priestling*, in his *Penna pennae pennae*, &c., throws an awe over my mind in his presence, and shortens my sentences into single ideas.

Farewell, and believe me to be ever, my dear Sir, yours,

R. B.



No. XCVI.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE, JUNR.,

BERRYWELL, DUNSE.

EDINBURGH, 23rd August, 1787.

"As I gaed up to Dunse,
To warp a pickle yarn,
Robin, silly body,
He gat me wi' bairn."

FROM henceforth, my dear Sir, I am determined to set off with my letters like the periodical writers ; viz., prefix a kind of text quoted from some Classic of undoubted authority, such as the author of the immortal piece, of which my text is a part. What I have to say on my text is exhausted in a letter I wrote you the other day, before I had the pleasure of receiving yours from Inverleithen ; and sure never was anything more lucky, as I have but

the time to write this, that Mr. Nicol on the opposite side of the table, takes to correct a proof-sheet of a thesis. They are gabbling Latin so loud that I cannot hear what my own soul is saying in my own scull, so must just give you a matter-of-fact sentence or two, and end, if time permit, with a verse *de rei generatione*.

To-morrow I leave Edinburgh in a chaise ; Nicol thinks it more comfortable than horseback, to which I say, Amen ; so Jenny Geddes goes home to Ayrshire, to use a phrase of my mother's, "wi' her finger in her mouth."

Now for a modest verse of classical authority :—

The cats like kitchen ;
The dogs like broo ;
The lasses like the lads weel,
And th' auld wives too.

Chorus—An' we're a' noddin',
Nid, nid, noddin',
We're a' noddin' fou at e'en.

If this does not please you, let me hear from you : if you write any time before the first of September, direct to Inverness, to be left at the Post Office till called for ; the next week at Aberdeen, the next at Edinburgh. The sheet is done, and I shall just conclude with assuring you that I am, and ever with pride shall be, my dear Sir,

R. B.

Call your boy what you think proper, only interject Burns. What say you to a scripture name ; for instance, Zimri Burns Ainslie, or Achitophel, &c., &c. ; look your Bible for these two heroes. If you do this, I will repay the compliment.



No. XCVII.

TO ST. JAMES' LODGE, TARBOLTON.

EDINBURGH, 23rd August, 1787.

MEN AND BRETHREN.

I AM truly sorry it is not in my power to be at your quarterly meeting. If I must be absent in body, believe me I shall be present in spirit. I suppose those who owe us monies, by bill or otherwise, will appear—I mean those we summoned. If you please, I wish you would delay prosecuting defaulters till I come home. The court is up, and I will be home before it sits down. In the meantime, to take a note of who appear and who do not, of our faulty debtors, will be right in my humble

opinion; and those who confess debt and crave days, I think we should spare them. Farewell!

"Within your dear mansion may wayward Contention,
And withered Envy ne'er enter;
May Secrecy round be the mystical bound,
And Brotherly Love be the centre."

R. B.

TO THE FREE MASONS OF ST. JAMES' LODGE,
Care of H. MANSON, TARBOLTON.



No. XCVIII.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR, KILMARNOCK.

MY DEAR SIR,

STIRLING, 26th August, 1787.

I INTENDED to have written you from Edinburgh, and now write you from Stirling to make an excuse. Here am I, on my way to Inverness, with a truly original, but very worthy man, a Mr. Nicol, one of the masters of the High School in Edinburgh. I left Auld Reekie yesterday morning, and have passed, besides by-excursions, Linlithgow, Borrowstounness, Falkirk, and here am I undoubtedly. This morning I knelt at the tomb of Sir John the Graham, the gallant friend of the immortal Wallace; and two hours ago I said a fervent prayer for Old Caledonia, over the hole in a blue whinstone, where Robert de Bruce fixed his royal standard on the banks of Bannockburn; and just now, from Stirling Castle, I have seen by the setting sun the glorious prospect of the windings of Forth through the rich earse of Stirling, and skirting the equally rich earse of Falkirk. The crops are very strong, but so very late, that there is no harvest, except a ridge or two perhaps in ten miles, all the way I have travelled from Edinburgh.

I left Andrew Bruce and family all well. I will be at least three weeks in making my tour, as I shall return by coast, and have many people to call for.

My best compliments to Charles our dear kinsman and fellow-saint; and Messrs. W. & H. Parkers. I hope Hughoe* is going on and prospering with God and Miss McCauslin.

If I could think on any thing sprightly, I should let you hear every other post; but a dull, matter-of-fact business, like this scrawl, the less and seldomer one writes the better.

* The Hughoe who figured in "Poor Mallic."

Among other matters of fact I shall add this, that I am and ever shall be, my dear Sir,—Your obliged,

R. B.



No. XCIX.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, Esq., MAUCULINE.

STIRLING, 26th August, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

HERE am I on my way to Inverness. I have rambled over the rich fertile earse of Falkirk and Stirling, and am delighted with their appearance: richly waving crops of wheat, barley, &c., but no harvest at all yet, except, in one or two places, an old wife's ridge. Yesterday morning I rode from this town up the meandering Devon's banks to pay my respects to some Ayrshire folks at Harvieston. After breakfast we made a party to go and see the famous Caudron-lynn, a remarkable cascade in the Devon, about five miles above Harvieston; and after spending one of the most pleasant days I ever had in my life, I returned to Stirling in the evening.† They are a family, Sir, though I had not had any prior tie—though they had not been the brothers and sisters of a certain generous friend of mine—I would never forget them. I am told you have not seen them these several years, so you can have very little idea of what these young folks are now. Your brother is as tall as you are, but slender rather than otherwise; and I have the satisfaction to inform you that he is getting the better of those consumptive symptoms which I suppose you know were threatening him. His make, and particularly his manner, resemble you, but he will have a still finer face. (I put in the word still to please Mrs. Hamilton). Good sense, modesty, and at the same time a just idea of that respect that man owes to man, and has a right in his turn to exact, are striking features in his character; and, what

† Burns visited the Devon along with Dr. Adair (afterwards of Harrowgate) in August 1787. We quote Adair's narrative:—

"From Stirling we went through the romantic and fertile vale of Devon to Harvieston, then inhabited by Mrs. Hamilton, mother of Mr. Gavin Hamilton, the Poet's Mauchline patron, with the younger part of whose family Burns had been previously acquainted. He introduced me to the family, and there was formed my first acquaintance with Mrs. Hamilton's eldest daughter, to whom I have been married for nine years. Thus was I indebted to Burns for a connection from which I have derived, and expect farther to derive, much happiness. During a residence of about ten days at Harvieston, we made excursions to visit various parts of the surrounding scenery, inferior to none in Scotland in beauty, sublimity, and romantic interest; particularly Castle Campbell, the ancient seat of the family of Argyle; the famous cataract of the Devon, called the Caldron Linn; and the Rumbling Bridge, a single broad arch, thrown by the devil, if tradition is to be trusted, across the river, at about the height of a hundred feet above its bed."

with me is the Alpha and Omega, he has a heart that might adorn the breast of a poet! Grace has a good figure, and the look of health and cheerfulness, but nothing else remarkable in her person. I scarcely ever saw so striking a likeness as is between her and your little Beenie; the mouth and chin particularly. She is reserved at first; but as we grew better acquainted, I was delighted with the native frankness of her manner, and the sterling sense of her observation. Of Charlotte I cannot speak in common terms of admiration; she is not only beautiful but lovely. Her form is elegant; her features not regular, but they have the smile of sweetness and the settled complacency of good nature in the highest degree; and her complexion, now that she has happily recovered her wonted health, is equal to Miss Burnet's. After the exercise of our riding to the Falls, Charlotte was exactly Dr. Donne's mistress:—

"Her pure and eloquent blood
Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,
That one would almost say her body thought."

Her eyes are fascinating; at once expressive of good sense, tenderness, and a noble mind.

I do not give you all this account, my good Sir, to flatter you. I mean it to reproach you. Such relations the first peer in the realm might own with pride; then why do you not keep up more correspondence with these so amiable young folks? I had a thousand questions to answer about you. I had to describe the little ones with the minuteness of anatomy. They were highly delighted when I told them that John* was so good a boy, and so fine a scholar, and that Willie [Wilhelmina] was going on still very pretty; but I have it on commission to tell her from them that beauty is a poor silly bauble, without she be good. Miss Chalmers I had left in Edinburgh; but I had the pleasure of meeting with Mrs. Chalmers, only Lady Mackenzie being rather a little alarmingly ill of a sore throat somewhat marred our enjoyment.

I shall not be in Ayrshire for four weeks. My most respectful compliments to Mrs. Hamilton, Miss Kennedy, and Dr. Mackenzie. I shall probably write him from some stage or other. I am ever, Sir, yours most gratefully,

R. B.



No. C.

TO MR. JAMES BURNES, WRITER, MONTROSE.

INVERNESS, 4th September, 1787.

DEAR COUSIN,

I WROTE you from Edinburgh that I intended being north. I shall be in Stonhivie sometime on Monday

* The "wee curlie Johnnie" mentioned in the Dedication to Gavin Hamilton.

the 10th inst., and I beg the favour of you to meet me there. I understand there is but one Inn at Stonhivie, so you cannot miss me. As I am in the country I certainly shall see any of my father's relations that are any way near my road; but I do not even know their names, or where one of them lives, so I hope you will meet me and be my guide. Farewell! till I have the pleasure of meeting you. I am ever, dear Sir, yours,

R. B.



No. CI.

TO WILLIAM INGLIS, Esq., INVERNESS.

ETTLER HOTEL, Tuesday Evening.

MR. BURNS presents his most respectful compliments to Mr. Inglis—would have waited on him with the inclosed,† but is jaded to death with the fatigue of to-day's journey—won't leave Inverness till Thursday morning.



No. CII.

TO MR. WALKER, BLAIR OF ATHOLE.‡

INVERNESS, 5th December, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE just time to write the foregoing, § and to tell you that it was (at least most part of it) the effusion of an half-hour I spent at Bruar. I do not mean it was extempore, for I have endeavoured to brush it up as well

† The inclosed was a letter of introduction to that gentleman (then Provost of Inverness) from the poet's friend, William Dunbar, Esq., W.S., "Colonel of the Crochallan Club," in the following terms:—"Dear Sir,—The gentleman by whom this will be delivered to you is Mr. Burns of Airshire, who goes on an excursion to the North, personally unacquainted, excepting in so far as his elegant and simple Poems may have caught your attention. To men of such liberal and disinterested feelings as I know the citizens of Inverness to be, little seemed necessary as recommendatory of the Bard of Nature. Yet I thought it unworthy of me to permit him to migrate without mentioning him to you as my friend, and consigning him to you for that civility which distinguishes you among all ranks of migrants. I offer my best respects to Mrs. Inglis, and am always, dear Sir, your most obedient servant. WILLIAM DUNBAR."

"EDINBURGH, 24th August, 1787."

‡ See LIFE.

§ This was "The Humble Petition of Bruar Water."

as Mr. Nicol's chat and the jogging of the chaise would allow. It eases my heart a good deal, as rhyme is the coin with which a poet pays his debts of honour or gratitude. What I owe to the noble family of Athole, of the first kind, I shall ever proudly boast; what I owe of the last, so help me God in my hour of need! I shall never forget.

The "little angel-band!" I declare I prayed for them very sincerely to-day at the Fall of Fyers. I shall never forget the fine family piece I saw at Blair: the amiable, the truly noble Duchess, with her smiling little seraph in her lap, at the head of the table: the lovely "olive plants," as the Hebrew bard finely says, round the happy mother: the beautiful Mrs. Grahame; the lovely, sweet Miss Cathcart, &c. I wish I had the powers of Guido to do them justice! My Lord Duke's kind hospitality—markedly kind indeed. Mr. Graham of Fintray's charms of conversation: Sir W. Murray's friendship: in short, the recollection of all that polite, agreeable company, raises an honest glow in my bosom.

R. B.



No. CIII.

TO MR. JAMES BURNES, WRITER, MONTROSE.

TOWNFIELD, six o'clock morning.

MY DEAR COUSIN,

MR. NICOL and Mr. Carnegie have taken some freak in their head, and have wakened me just now with the rattling of the chaise to carry me to meet them at Craigie to go on our journey some other road, and breakfast by the way. I must go, which makes me very sorry. I beg my kindest, best compliments to your wife and all the good friends I saw yesternight. Write me to Edinburgh in this week, with a direction for your nephew in Glasgow. Direct to me—care of Mr. Creech, Edinburgh. I am ever, my dear Cousin—Yours truly,

R. B.



No. CIV.

TO MR. GILBERT BURNS, MOSSGIEL.

EDINBURGH, 17th September, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I ARRIVED here safe yesterday evening, after a tour of twenty-two days, and travelling near six hundred

miles, windings included. My farthest stretch was about ten miles beyond Inverness. I went through the heart of the Highlands by Crieff, Taymouth, the famous seat of Lord Breadalbane, down the Tay, among cascades and Druidical circles of stones, to Dunkeld, a seat of the Duke of Athole; thence across Tay, and up one of his tributary streams to Blair of Athole, another of the Duke's seats, where I had the honour of spending nearly two days with his Grace and family; thence many miles through a wild country, among cliffs grey with eternal snows, and gloomy savage glens, till I crossed Spey and went down the stream through Strathspey, so famous in Scottish music; Badenoch, &c., till I reached Grant Castle, where I spent half a day with Sir James Grant and family; and then crossed the country for Fort-George, but called by the way at Cawdor, the ancient seat of Macbeth; there I saw the identical bed in which tradition says King Duncan was murdered; lastly, from Fort-George to Inverness.

I returned by the coast, through Nairn, Forres, and so on, to Aberdeen, thence to Stonehive, where James Burness, from Montrose, met me by appointment. I spent two days among our relations, and found our aunts, Jean and Isabel, still alive, and hale old women. John Caird, though born the same year with our father, walks as vigorously as I can: they have had several letters from his son in New York. William Brand is likewise a stout old fellow; but further particulars I delay till I see you, which will be in two or three weeks. The rest of my stages are not worth rehearsing; warm as I was from Ossian's country, where I had seen his very grave, what cared I for fishing-towns or fertile carse? I slept at the famous Brodie of Brodie's one night, and dined at Gordon Castle next day, with the Duke, Duchess, and family. I am thinking to cause my old mare to meet me, by means of John Ronald, at Glasgow; but you shall hear farther from me before I leave Edinburgh. My duty and many compliments from the north to my mother; and my brotherly compliments to the rest. I have been trying for a berth for William, but am not likely to be successful. Farewell.

R. B.



No. CV.

TO MR. JAMES BURNES, WRITER, MONTROSE.

EDINBURGH, 19th September, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I SEND you, along with this, nine copies which you will transmit as marked on the blank leaves. The

one to Lord Gardenstone you will transmit as soon as possible. Your hints about young Hudson I shall carefully remember when I call for him.

Any thing you send me, direct to the care of Mr. Andrew Bruce, Merchant, Bridge Street, Edinburgh; but I am afraid that your kind offer of the dry fish will cost more than they are worth to carriers. My compliments to your wife and all friends, and excuse this brevity in—
Yours ever,

R. B.



No. CVI.

TO PATRICK MILLER, Esq., DALSWINTON.

EDINBURGH, 28th September, 1787.

SIR,

I HAVE been on a tour through the Highlands, and arrived in town but the other day, so could not wait on you at Dalswinton about the latter end of August, as I had promised and intended.

Independent of any views of future connections, what I owe you for the past, as a friend and benefactor (when friends I had few, and benefactors I had none), strongly in my bosom prohibits the most distant instance of ungrateful disrespect. I am informed you do not come to town for a month still, and within that time I shall certainly wait on you, as by this time I suppose you will have settled your scheme with respect to your farms.

My journey through the Highlands was perfectly inspiring, and I hope I have laid in a good stock of new poetical ideas from it. I shall make no apology for sending you the enclosed;* it is a small but grateful tribute to the memory of our common countryman. I have the honour to be, with the most grateful sincerity, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.

P.S.—I have added another poem, partly as it alludes to some folks nearly and dearly connected with Ayrshire, and partly as rhymes are the only coin in which the poor poet can pay his debts of gratitude. The lady alluded to is Miss Isabella McLeod, aunt to the young Countess of London.

As I am determined not to leave Edinburgh till I wind up my matters with Mr. Creech, which I am afraid will be a tedious business, should I unfortunately miss you at Dalswinton, perhaps your factor will be able to inform me of your intentions with respect to Elesland farm, which will save me a jaunt to Edinburgh again.

* The elegy on Sir James Hunter Blair.

There is something so suspicious in the profession of attachment from a little man to a great man, that I know not how to do justice to the grateful warmth of my heart, when I would say how truly I am interested in the welfare of your little troop of angels, and how much I have the honour to be again, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R B



No. CVII.

TO MR. WILLIAM NICOL, EDINBURGH.

OCHTERTYRE, Monday, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I FIND myself very comfortable here, neither oppressed by ceremony nor mortified by neglect. Lady Augusta is a most engaging woman, and very happy in her family, which makes one's outgoings and incomings very agreeable. I called at Mr. Ramsay's of Auchtertyre as I came up the country, and am so delighted with him, that I shall certainly accept of his invitation to spend a day or two with him as I return. I leave this place on Wednesday or Thursday.

Make my compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Cruikshank, and Mrs. Nicol, if she is returned. I am ever, dear Sir, your deeply indebted,

R. B.



No. CVIII.

MR. WILLIAM CRUIKSHANK, EDINBURGH.

OCHTERTYRE, Monday, 1787.

I HAVE nothing, my dear Sir, to write to you, but that I feel myself exceedingly comfortably situated in this good family—just notice enough to make me easy but not to embarrass me. I was storm-stayed two days at the foot of the Ochil Hills, with Mr. Tait of Harvieston and Mr. Johnston of Alva; but was so well pleased that I shall certainly spend a day on the banks of the Devon as I return. I leave this place, I suppose, on Wednesday, and shall devote a day to Mr. Ramsay of Auchtertyre near Stirling—a man to whose worth I cannot do justice. My respectful kind compliments to Mrs. Cruikshank, and my dear little Jeanie; and if you see Mr. Masterton, please remember me to him. I am ever, my dear Sir, &c.,

R. B.

CIX.

TO PATRICK MILLER, Esq., DALSWINTON.

EDINBURGH, 20th October, 1787.

SIR,

I WAS spending a few days at Sir William Murray's, Ochiltrey, and did not get your obliging letter till to-day I came to town. I was still more unlucky in catching a miserable cold, for which the medical gentlemen have ordered me into close confinement, "under pain of death"—the severest of penalties. In two or three days, if I get better, and if I hear at your lodgings that you are still at Dalswinton, I will take a ride to Dumfries directly. From something in your last, I would wish to explain my idea of being your tenant. I want to be a farmer in a small farm, about a plough-gang, in a pleasant country, under the auspices of a good landlord. I have no foolish notion of being a tenant on easier terms than another. To find a farm where one can live at all is not easy—I only mean living soberly, like an old-style farmer, and joining personal industry. The banks of the Nith are as sweet poetic ground as any I ever saw; and besides, Sir, 'tis but justice to the feelings of my own heart, and the opinion of my best friends, to say that I would wish to call you landlord sooner than any landed gentleman I know. These are my views and wishes; and in whatever way you think best to lay out your farms, I shall be happy to rent one of them. I shall certainly be able to ride to Dalswinton about the middle of next week, if I hear that you are not gone. I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.



CX.

TO JAMES HOY, Esq., GORDON CASTLE.*

EDINBURGH, 20th October, 1787.

SIR,

I WILL defend my conduct in giving you this trouble, on the best of Christian principles—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." I shall certainly, among my legacies, leave my latest curse to that unlucky predicament which hurried—tore me away from Castle Gordon. May that obstinate son of Latin prose be cursed to Scotch-mile periods, and damned to seven-league paragraphs; while Declension

* James Hoy, librarian to the Duke of Gordon, a man of great learning and simplicity of character, a kind of Dominie Sampson.

and Conjugation, Gender, Number, and Tense, under the ragged banners of Dissonance and Disarrangement, eternally rank against him in hostile array.

Allow me, Sir, to strengthen the small claim I have to your acquaintance, by the following request. An engraver, James Johnson, in Edinburgh, has, not from mercenary views, but from an honest Scotch enthusiasm, set about collecting all our native songs and setting them to music; particularly those that have never been set before. Clarke, the well-known musician, presides over the musical arrangement, and Drs. Beattie and Blacklock, Mr. Tytler of Woodhouselee, and your humble servant to the utmost of his small power, assist in collecting the old poetry, or sometimes for a fine air make a stanza, when it has no words. The brats (too tedious to mention) which claim a parental pang from my hardship, I suppose will appear in Johnson's second number—the first was published before my acquaintance with him. My request is—"Could Kail in Aberdeen" is one intended for this number, and I beg a copy of his Grace of Gordon's words to it, which you were so kind as to repeat to me. You may be sure we won't prefix the author's name, except you like, though I look on it as no small merit to this work that the names of so many of the authors of our old Scotch songs, names almost forgotten, will be inserted. I do not well know where to write to you—I rather write at you: but if you will be so obliging, immediately on receipt of this, as to write me a few lines I shall perhaps pay you in kind, though not in quality. Johnson's terms are:—each number a handsome pocket volume, to consist of a hundred Scotch songs, with basses for the harpsichord, &c. The price to subscribers, 5s.; to non-subscribers, 6s. He will have three numbers, I conjecture.

My direction, for two or three weeks, will be at Mr. William Cruikshank's, St. James's Square, New Town, Edinburgh. I am, Sir, yours to command,

R. B.



No. CXI.

TO REV. JOHN SKINNER.†

EDINBURGH, October 25, 1787.

REVEREND AND VENERABLE SIR,

ACCEPT, in plain dull prose, my most sincere thanks for the best poetical compliment I ever received. I assure you, Sir, as a poet, you have conjured up an airy demon of vanity in my fancy, which the best abilities

† See LIFE.

in your other capacity would be ill able to lay. I regret, and while I live I shall regret, that when I was in the north, I had not the pleasure of paying a younger brother's dutiful respects to the author of the best Scotch song ever Scotland saw—"Tullochgorum's my delight!" The world may think slightly of the craft of song-making if they please, but, as Job says, "O that mine adversary had written a book!"—let them try. There is a certain something in the old Scotch songs, a wild happiness of thought and expression, which peculiarly marks them not only from English songs, but also from the modern efforts of song-wrights, in our native manner and language. The only remains of this enchantment, these spells of the imagination, rest with you. Our true brother, Ross of Lochlee, was likewise "owre cannie"—"a wild warlock"—but now he sings among the "sons of the morning."

I have often wished, and will certainly endeavour to form a kind of common acquaintance among all the genuine sons of Caledonian song. The world, busy in low prosaic pursuits, may overlook most of us; but "reverence thyself." The world is not our *peers*, so we challenge the jury. We can lash that world, and find ourselves a very great source of amusement and happiness independent of that world.

There is a work going on in Edinburgh just now which claims your best assistance. An engraver in this town has set about collecting and publishing all the Scotch songs, with the music, that can be found. Songs in the English language, if by Scotchmen, are admitted, but the music must all be Scotch. Drs. Beattie and Blacklock are lending a hand, and the first musician in the town presides over that department. I have been absolutely crazed about it, collecting old stanzas, and every information remaining respecting their origin, authors, &c., &c. This last is but a very fragment-business; but at the end of his second number—the first is already published—a small account will be given of the authors, particularly to preserve those of later times. Your three songs "Tullochgorum," "John of Badenyon," and "Ewie wi' the Crookit Horn," go into this second number. I was determined, before I got your letter, to write you, begging that you would let me know where the editions of these pieces may be found, as you would wish them to continue in future times; and if you be so kind to this undertaking as send any songs, of your own or others, that you would think proper to publish, your name will be inserted among the other authors—"Nill ye, will ye." One half of Scotland already give your songs to other authors. Paper is done. I beg to hear from you; the sooner the better, as I leave Edinburgh in a fortnight or three weeks. I am, with the warmest sincerity, Sir, your obliged humble servant,*

R. B.

* Mr. Skinner answered the above, November 14, 1787.

NO. CXII.

TO MISS CHALMERS, HARVIESTON.†

EDINBURGH, October 26, 1787.

I SEND Charlotte the first number of the songs; I would not wait for the second number; I hate delays in little marks of friendship, as I hate dissimulation in the language of the heart. I am determined to pay Charlotte a poetic compliment, if I could hit on some glorious old Scotch air, in number second.‡ You will see a small attempt on a shred of paper in the book; but though Dr. Blacklock commended it very highly, I am not just satisfied with it myself. I intend to make it description of some kind: the whining cant of love, except in real passion, and by a masterly hand, is to me as insufferable as the preaching cant of old Father Smeaton, Whig-minister at Kilmaurs. Darts, flames, cupids, loves, graces, and all that farrago, are just a Mauchline sacrament—a senseless rabble.

I got an excellent poetic epistle yesternight from the old, venerable author of Tullochgorum, John of Badenyon, &c. I suppose you know he is a clergyman. It is by far the finest poetic compliment I ever got. I will send you a copy of it.

I go on Thursday or Friday to Dumfries to wait on Mr. Miller about his farms. Do tell that to Lady Mackenzie, that she may give me credit for a little wisdom. "I Wisdom dwell with Prudence." What a blessed fire-side! How happy should I be to pass a winter evening under their venerable roof! and smoke a pipe of tobacco, or drink water-gruel with them! What solemn, lengthened, laughter-quashing gravity of phiz! What sage remarks on the good-for-nothing sons and daughters of indiscretion and folly! And what frugal lessons, as we straitened the fire-side circle, on the uses of the poker and tongs!

Miss Nimmo is very well, and begs to be remembered in the old way to you. I used all my eloquence, all the persuasive flourishes of the hand, and heart-melting modulation of periods in my power, to urge her out to Harvieston, but all in vain. My rhetoric seems quite to have lost its effect on the lovely half of mankind. I have seen the day—but that is a "tale of other years." In my conscience I believe that my heart has been so oft on fire that it is absolutely vitrified. I look on the sex with something like the admiration with which I regard the starry sky in a frosty December night. I admire the beauty of the Creator's workmanship; I am charmed with the wild but graceful eccentricity of their motions, and—wish them good night. I mean this with respect to a

† Afterwards Mrs. Lewis Hay.

‡ Of the "Museum."

certain passion *dont j'ai en l'honneur d'être un miserable esclave*: as for friendship, you and Charlotte have given me pleasure, permanent pleasure, "which the world cannot give, nor take away," I hope; and which will outlast the heavens and the earth.*

R. B.



CXIII.

TO MR. JAMES CANDLISH, GLASGOW.

EDINBURGH, *November, 1787.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

IF once I were gone from this scene of hurry and dissipation, I promise myself the pleasure of that correspondence being renewed which has been so long broken. At present I have time for nothing. Dissipation and business engross every moment. I am engaged in assisting an honest Scotch enthusiast, a friend of mine, who is an engraver, and has taken it into his head to publish a collection of all our songs set to music, of which the words and music are done by Scotsmen. This, you will easily guess, is an undertaking exactly to my taste. I have collected, begged, borrowed, and stolen, all the songs I could meet with. "Pompey's Ghost," words and music, I beg from you immediately, to go into his second number: the first is already published. I shall shew you the first number when I see you in Glasgow, which will be in a fortnight or less. Do be so kind as to send me the song in a day or two: you cannot imagine how much it will oblige me.

Direct to me at Mr. W. Cruikshank's, St. James's Square, New Town, Edinburgh.

R. B.



No. CXIV.

TO JAMES HOY, Esq., GORDON CASTLE.

EDINBURGH, *6th November, 1787.*

DEAR SIR,

I WOULD have wrote you immediately on receipt of your kind letter, but a mixed impulse of gratitude and

* Mrs. Adair (Charlotte Hamilton) burnt most of the letters to Margaret Chalmers; only a few portions remain.

esteem whispered to me that I ought to send you something by way of return. When a poet owes anything, particularly when he is indebted for good offices, the payment that usually recurs to him—the only coin indeed in which he probably is conversant—is rhyme. Johnson sends the books by the fly, as directed, and begs me to enclose his most grateful thanks: my return I intended should have been one or two poetic bagatelles which the world have not seen, or perhaps, for obvious reasons, cannot see. These I shall send you before I leave Edinburgh. They may make you laugh a little, which, on the whole, is no bad way of spending one's precious hours and still more precious breath: at any rate, they will be, though a small, yet a very sincere mark of my respectful esteem for a gentleman whose further acquaintance I should look upon as a peculiar obligation.

The Duke's song, independent totally of his dukeship, charms me.† There is I know not what of wild happiness of thought and expression peculiarly beautiful in the old Scottish song style, of which his Grace, old venerable Skinner, the author of "Tullochgorum," &c., and the late Ross, at Lochlee, of true Scottish poetic memory, are the only modern instances that I recollect, since Ramsay with his contemporaries, and poor Bob Ferguson went to the world of deathless existence and truly immortal song. The mob of mankind, that many-headed beast, would laugh at so serious a speech about an old song; but, as Job says, "O that mine adversary had written a book!" Those who think that composing a Scotch song is a trifling business—let them try it.

I wish my Lord Duke would pay a proper attention to the Christian admonition—"Hide not your candle under a bushel," but "let your light shine before men." I could name half a dozen dukes that I guess are a devilish deal worse employed: nay, I question if there are half a dozen better: perhaps there are not half that scanty number whom Heaven has favoured with the tuneful, happy, and, I will say, glorious gift. I am, dear Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.



No. CXV.

TO MISS CHALMERS, HARVIESTON.

EDINBURGH, *6th November, 1787.*

MY DEAR MADAM,

I JUST now have read yours. The poetic compliments I pay cannot be misunderstood. They are

† Alexander, fourth Duke of Gordon, wrote words to "Could Kail in Aberdeen," a copy of which Burns got from Hoy and inserted in the first vol. of the "Museum."

neither of them so particular as to point you out to the world at large; and the circle of your acquaintances will allow all I have said. Besides, I have complimented you chiefly, almost solely, on your mental charms. Shall I be plain with you? I will; so look to it. Personal attractions, Madam, you have much above par; wit, understanding, and worth, you possess in the first class. This is a cursed flat way of telling you these truths, but let me hear no more of your sheepish timidity. I know the world a little. I know what they will say of my poems (by second sight, I suppose, for I am seldom out in my conjectures); and you may believe me, my dear Madam, I would not run any risk of hurting you by an ill-judged compliment. I wish to show to the world the odds between a poet's friends and those of simple prosemen. More for your information, both the pieces go in. One of them, "Where braving angry winter's storms," is already set—the tune is Neil Gow's lamentation for Abercarny; the other is to be set to an old Highland air in Daniel Dow's "Collection of ancient Scotch music;" the name is *Hu a Chaillich air mo Dheidh*. My treacherous memory has forgot every circumstance about *Les Incas*, only I think you mentioned them as being in Creech's possession. I shall ask him about it. I am afraid the song of "Somebody" will come too late—as I shall, for certain, leave town in a week for Ayrshire, and from that to Dumfries, but there my hopes are slender. I leave my direction in town, so any thing, wherever I am, will reach me.

I saw your's to ———; it is not too severe, nor did he take it amiss. On the contrary, like a whipt spaniel he talks of being with you in the Christmas days. Mr. Tait has given him the invitation, and he is determined to accept of it. O selfishness! he owns in his sober moments, that from his own volatility of inclination, the circumstances in which he is situated, and his knowledge of his father's disposition, the whole affair is chimerical—yet he *will* gratify an idle *penchant* at the enormous, cruel expense of perhaps ruining the peace of the very woman for whom he professes the generous passion of love! He is a gentleman in his mind and manners—*tant pis!* He is a volatile school-boy: the heir of a man's fortune who well knows the value of two times two!

Perdition seize them and their fortunes, before they should make the amiable, the lovely ——— the derided object of their purse-proud contempt.

I am doubly happy to hear of Mrs. ———'s recovery, because I really thought all was over with her. There are days of pleasure yet awaiting her.

"As I cam in by Glenap;

I met with an aged woman;

She bade me cheer up my heart.

For the best o' my days was comin'."

* See LIFE.

This day will decide my affairs with Creech. Things are, like myself, not what they ought to be; yet better than what they appear to be.

"Heaven's Sovereign saves all beings but himself—
That hideous sight—a naked human heart."

Farewell! remember me to Charlotte.

R. B.



No. CXVI.

TO MISS CHALMERS, HARVIESTON.

EDINBURGH, 1787.

I HAVE been at Dumfries, and at one visit more shall be decided about a farm in that country. I am rather hopeless in it; but as my brother is an excellent farmer, and is, besides, an exceedingly prudent, sober man (qualities which are only a younger brother's fortune in our family), I am determined, if my Dumfries business fail me, to return into partnership with him, and at our leisure take another farm in the neighbourhood. I assure you I look for high compliments from you and Charlotte on this very sage instance of my unfathomable, incomprehensible wisdom. Talking of Charlotte, I must tell her that I have, to the best of my power, paid her a poetic compliment, now completed.† The air is admirable: true old Highland. It was the tune of a Gaelic song which an Inverness lady sung me when I was there; and I was so charmed with it that I begged her to write me a set of it from her singing; for it had never been set before. I am fixed that it shall go in Johnson's next number: so Charlotte and you need not spend your precious time in contradicting me. I won't say the poetry is first-rate; though I am convinced it is very well; and, what is not always the case with compliments to ladies, it is not only sincere, but just.

R. B.



No. CXVII.

TO MISS CHALMERS, HARVIESTON.

EDINBURGH, November 21, 1787.

I HAVE one vexatious fault to the kindly-welcome, well-filled sheet which I owe to your and Charlotte's‡ goodness

† See "The Banks of the Devon," vol. i. p. 132.

‡ Charlotte Hamilton.

—it contains too much sense, sentiment, and good-spelling. It is impossible that even you two, whom I declare to my God I will give credit for any degree of excellence the sex are capable of attaining, it is impossible you can go on to correspond at that rate; so like those who, Shenstone says, retire because they have made a good speech, I shall, after a few letters, hear no more of you. I insist that you shall write whatever comes first: what you see, what you read, what you hear, what you admire, what you dislike, trifles, bagatelles, nonsense; or to fill up a corner, e'en put down a laugh at full length. Now none of your polite hints about flattery: I leave that to your lovers, if you have or shall have any; though, thank heaven, I have found at last two girls who can be luxuriantly happy in their own minds and with one another, without that commonly necessary appendage to female bliss—A LOVER.

Charlotte and you are just two favourite resting-places for my soul in her wanderings through the weary, thorny wilderness of this world—Gods knows I am ill-fitted for the struggle: I glory in being a Poet, and I want to be thought a wise man—I would fondly be generous, and I wish to be rich. After all, I am afraid I am a lost subject. "Some folk hae a hantle o' fauts, an' I'm but a ne'er-do-weel."

Afternoon.—To close the melancholy reflections at the end of last sheet, I shall just add a piece of devotion commonly known in Carrick by the title of the "Wabster's grace:"

"Some say we're thieves, and e'en sae are we!
Some say we lie, and e'en sae do we!
Gude forgie us, and I hope sae will He!
Up and to your booms, lads."

R. B.



No. CXVIII.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE, ST. JAMES' SQUARE.

SUNDAY MORNING, *November 25, 1787.*

I BEG, my dear Sir, you will not make any appointment to take us to Mr. Ainslie's to-night. On looking over my engagements, constitution, present state of my health, some little vexatious soul concerns, &c., I find I can't sup abroad to-night. I shall be in to-day till one o'clock, if you have a leisure hour.

You will think it romantic when I tell you, that I find the idea of your friendship almost necessary to my existence. You assume a proper length of face in my bitter hours of blue-devilism, and you laugh fully up to my highest wishes at my good things. I don't know,

upon the whole, if you are one of the first fellows in God's world, but you are so to me. I tell you this just now, in the conviction that some inequalities in my temper and manner may perhaps sometimes make you suspect that I am not so warmly as I ought to be your friend,

R. B.



No. CXIX.

TO MISS MABANE, EDINBURGH.

No. 2 ST. JAMES' SQUARE, NEW TOWN,
EDINBURGH, *Saturday Noon.*

HERE have I sat, my dear Madam, in the stony attitude of perplexed study for fifteen vexatious minutes, my head askew, bending over the intended card, my fixed eye insensible to the very light of day poured around; my pendulous goose-feather, loaded with ink, hanging over the future letter; all for the important purpose of writing a complimentary card to accompany your trinket.

Compliment is such a miserable Greenland expression, and lies at such a chilly polar distance from the torrid zone of my constitution that I cannot, for the very soul of me, use it to any person for whom I have the twentieth part of the esteem every one must have for you who knows you.

As I leave town in three or four days, I can give myself the pleasure of calling on you only for a minute. Tuesday evening, sometime about seven or after, I shall wait on you for your farewell commands.

The hinge of your box I put into the hands of the proper connoisseur. The broken glass likewise went under review; but deliberative wisdom thought it would too much endanger the whole fabric. I am, dear Madam, with all sincerity of enthusiasm, your very obedient servant,

R. B.



No. CXX.

TO MISS CHALMERS, HARVIESTON

EDINBURGH, *December 12, 1787.*

I AM here under the care of a surgeon, with a bruised limb extended on a cushion; and the tints of my mind vying with the livid horror preceding a midnight thunder-

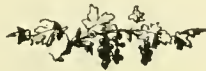
storm. A drunken coachman was the cause of the first, and incomparably the lightest evil; misfortune, bodily constitution, hell, and myself, have formed a "Quadruple Alliance" to guarantee the other. I got my fall on Saturday (December 8), and am getting slowly better.

I have taken tooth and nail to the Bible, and am got through the five books of Moses, and half way in Joshua. It is really a glorious book. I sent for my book-binder to-day, and ordered him to get me an octavo Bible in sheets, the best paper and print in town; and bind it with all the elegance of his craft.

I would give my best song to my worst enemy, I mean the merit of making it, to have you and Charlotte by me. You are angelic creatures, and would pour oil and wine into my wounded spirit.

I enclose you a proof copy of the "Banks of the Devon,"* which present with my best wishes to Charlotte. The "Ochil-hills"† you shall probably have next week for yourself. None of your fine speeches!

R. B.



No. CXXI.

TO MR. FRANCIS HOWDEN,

JEWELLER, PARLIAMENT SQUARE.

ST. JAMES' SQUARE, No. 2, Attic Storey.

THE bearer of this will deliver you a small shade to set; which, my dear Sir, if you would highly oblige a poor cripple devil as I am at present, you will finish at furthest against to-morrow evening. It goes a hundred miles into the country; and if it is at me by five o'clock to-morrow evening, I have an opportunity of a private hand to convey it; if not, I don't know how to get it sent. Set it just as you did the others you did for me—"in the neatest and cheapest manner;" both to answer as a breast-pin, and with a ring to answer as a locket. Do despatch it; as it is, I believe, the pledge of love, and perhaps the prelude to ma-tri-mo-ny. Everybody knows the auld wife's observation when she saw a poor dog going to be hanged—"God help us! it's the gate we ha'e a' to gang!"

The parties, one of them at least, is a very particular acquaintance of mine—the honest lover. He only needs a little of an advice which my grandmother, rest her soul, often gave me, and I as often neglected—

"Leuk twice or ye loop ance."

* See vol. i. p. 132.

† See the Song (vol. i. p. 130) beginning—

"Where braving angry winter's storms."

Let me conjure you, my friend, by the bended bow of Cupid—by the unloosed cestus of Venus—by the lighted torch of Hymen—that you will have the locket finished by the time mentioned! And if your worship would have as much Christian charity as call with it yourself, and comfort a poor wretch, not wounded indeed by Cupid's arrow, but bruised by a good, serious, agonizing, damned, hard knock on the knee, you will gain the earnest prayers, when he does pray, of, dear Sir, your humble servant,

R. B.



No. CXXII.

TO CHARLES HAY, Esq., ADVOCATE.†

SIR,

THE enclosed poem§ was written in consequence of your suggestion, last time I had the pleasure of seeing you. It cost me an hour or two of next morning's sleep, but did not please me; so it lay by, an ill-digested effort, till the other day that I gave it a eritic brush. These kind of subjects are much hackneyed; and, besides, the wailings of the rhyming tribe over the ashes of the great are cursedly suspicious, and out of all character for sincerity. These ideas damped my Muse's fire; however, I have done the best I could, and, at all events, it gives me an opportunity of declaring that I have the honour to be, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

R. B.



No. CXXIII.

TO MISS CHALMERS, HARVIESTON.

EDINBURGH, December 19, 1787.

I BEGIN this letter in answer to yours of the 17th current, which is not yet cold since I read it. The atmosphere of my soul is vastly clearer than when I wrote you last. For the first time, yesterday I crossed the room on crutches. It would do your heart good to see my bardship, not on my poetie, but on my oaken stilts; throwing my best leg with an air! and with as much hilarity in my gait and countenance, as a May frog leaping across the newly harrowed ridge, enjoying the fragrance of the refreshed earth after the long expected shower!

† Mr. Hay was a member of the "Crochallan Fencibles Club." He had been an advocate, and was raised to the bench as Lord Newton. He was able, upright, and convivial. He died at Powrie, Forfarshire, in 1811.

§ See Elegy on the death of Lord President Dundas, vol. i. p. 133.

I can't say I am altogether at my ease when I see anywhere in my path that meagre, squalid, famine-faced spectre—Poverty—attended as he always is by iron-fisted Oppression, and leering Contempt; but I have sturdily withstood his buffetings many a hard-laboured day already, and still my motto is—I DARE! My worst enemy is *moi même*. I lie so miserably open to the inroads and incursions of a mischievous, light-armed, well-mounted banditti, under the banners of imagination, whim, caprice, and passion; and the heavy-armed veteran regulars of wisdom, prudence, and forethought move so very, very slow, that I am almost in a state of perpetual warfare, and, alas! frequent defeat. There are just two creatures I would envy—a horse in his wild state traversing the forests of Asia, or an oyster on some of the desert shores of Europe. The one has not a wish without enjoyment, the other has neither wish nor fear.

R. B.



No. CXXIV.

TO MR. RICHARD BROWN,* IRVINE.

EDINBURGH, 30th December, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE met with few things in life which have given me more pleasure than Fortune's kindness to you since those days in which we met in the vale of misery; as I can honestly say that I never knew a man who more truly deserved it, or to whom my heart more truly wished it. I have been much indebted since that time to your story and sentiments for steeling my mind against evils, of which I have had a pretty decent share. My Will-o'-wisp fate you know: do you recollect a Sunday we spent together in Eglinton Woods? You told me, on my repeating some verses to you, that you wondered I could resist the temptation of sending verses of such merit to a magazine. It was from this remark I derived that idea of my own pieces which encouraged me to endeavour at the character of a poet. I am happy to hear that you will be two or three months at home. As soon as a bruised limb will permit me I shall return to Ayrshire, and we shall meet; "and faith, I hope we'll not sit dumb, nor yet cast out!"

I have much to tell you "of men, their manners, and their ways;" perhaps a little of the other sex. *Appropos*, I beg to be remembered to Mrs. Brown. There, I doubt

* See LIFE. Brown died in Greenock, much respected.

not, my dear friend, but you have found substantial happiness. I expect to find you something of an altered, but not a different man; the wild, bold, generous young fellow, composed into the steady affectionate husband, and the fond, careful parent. For me, I am just the same will-o'-wisp being I used to be. About the first and fourth quarters of the moon, I generally set in for the trade-wind of wisdom; but about the full and change, I am the luckless victim of mad tornadoes, which blow me into Chaos. Almighty love still reigns and revels in my bosom; and I am at this moment ready to hang myself for a young Edinburgh widow, who has wit and wisdom more murderously fatal than the assassinating stiletto of the Sicilian bandit, or the poisoned arrow of the savage African. My highland dirk, that used to hang beside my crutches, I have removed into a neighbouring closet, the key of which I cannot command, in case of spring-tide paroxysms. You may guess of her wit by the following verses which she sent me the other day.† My best compliment to my friend, Allan.—Adieu!

R. B.



No. CXXV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, January 21, 1788.

. . . . AFTER six weeks' confinement, I am beginning to walk across the room. They have been six horrible weeks; anguish and low spirits made me unfit to read, write, or think.

I have a hundred times wished that one could resign life as an officer resigns his commission, for I would not take in any poor ignorant wretch by selling out. Lately I was a sixpenny private, and, God knows, a miserable soldier enough; now I march on the campaign, a starving cadet—a little more conspicuously wretched.

I am ashamed of all this; for though I do want bravery for the welfare of life, I could wish, like some other soldiers, to have as much fortitude or cunning as to dissemble or conceal my cowardice.

As soon as I can bear the journey, which will be, I suppose, about the middle of next week, I leave Edinburgh; and soon after I shall pay my grateful duty at Dunlop House.

R. B.

† "Talk not of love it gives me pain." See Letters to Clarinda.

No. CXXVI.

TO MISS MARGARET CHALMERS.

January, 1788.

Now for that wayward, unfortunate thing, *myself*. I have broke measures with Creech, and last week I wrote him a frosty, keen letter. He replied in terms of chastisement, and promised me upon his honour that I shall have the account on Monday; but this is Tuesday, and yet I have not heard a word from him. God have mercy on me! a poor, damned, incautious, duped, unfortunate fool! The sport, the miserable victim of rebellious pride, hypochondriac imagination, agonizing sensibility, and bedlam passions!

"I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to die!" I had lately "a hairbreadth 'scape in the imminent deadly breach," of love too. Thank my stars, I got off heart-whole, "waur fleyed than hurt."—Interruption.

I have this moment got a hint. . . . I fear I am something like—undone; but I hope the best. Come stubborn Pride and unshrinking Resolution, accompany me through this, to me, miserable world! You must not desert me. Your friendship I think I can count on, though I should date my letters from a marching Regiment. Early in life, and all my life, I reckoned on a recruiting drum as my forlorn-hope. Seriously though, life presents me with but a melancholy path: but—my limb will soon be sound, and I shall struggle on.

R. B.



No. CXXVII.

TO THE EARL OF GLENCAIRN.

EDINBURGH, 1788.

I KNOW your Lordship will disapprove of my ideas in a request I am going to make to you; but I have weighed, long and seriously weighed, my situation, my hopes, and turn of mind, and am fully fixed to my scheme if I can possibly effectuate it. I wish to get into the Excise: I am told that your Lordship's interest will easily procure me the grant from the Commissioners; and your Lordship's patronage and goodness, which have already rescued me from obscurity, wretchedness, and exile, embolden me to ask that interest. You have likewise put it in my power to save the little tie of home that sheltered an aged mother, two brothers, and three

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sisters from destruction. There, my Lord, you have bound me over to the highest gratitude.

My brother's farm is but a wretched lease, but I think he will probably weather out the remaining seven years of it; and after the assistance which I have given and will give him, to keep the family together, I think, by my guess, I shall have rather better than two hundred pounds; and instead of seeking, what is almost impossible at present to find, a farm that I can certainly live by, with so small a stock, I shall lodge this sum in a banking-house, a sacred deposit, excepting only the calls of uncommon distress or necessitous old age. . . .

These, my Lord, are my views: I have resolved from the maturest deliberation; and now I am fixed, I shall leave no stone unturned to carry my resolve into execution. Your Lordship's patronage is the strength of my hopes; nor have I yet applied to anybody else. Indeed, my heart sinks within me at the idea of applying to any other of the Great who have honoured me with their countenance. I am ill qualified to dog the heels of greatness with the impertinence of solicitation, and tremble nearly as much at the thought of the cold promise as the cold denial: but to your Lordship I have not only the honour, the comfort, but the pleasure of being—Your Lordship's much obliged and deeply indebted humble servant,

R. B.



No. CXXVIII.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, Esq., OF FINTRY.

EDINBURGH, 1788.

SIR,

WHEN I had the honour of being introduced to you at Athole-house, I did not think so soon of asking a favour of you. When Lear, in Shakspeare, asked Old Kent why he wished to be in his service, he answers, "Because you have that in your face which I would fain call master." For some such reason, Sir, do I now solicit your patronage. You know, I dare say, of an application I lately made to your Board to be admitted an officer of Excise. I have, according to form, been examined by a supervisor, and to-day I give in his certificate, with a request for an order for instructions. In this affair, if I succeed, I am afraid I shall but too much need a patronizing friend. Propriety of conduct as a man, and fidelity and attention as an officer, I dare engage for; but with any thing like business, except manual labour, I am totally unacquainted. . . .

20

I had intended to have closed my late appearance on the stage of life, in the character of a country farmer; but after discharging some filial and fraternal claims, I find I could only fight for existence in that miserable manner, which I have lived to see throw a venerable parent into the jaws of a jail, whence death, the poor man's last and often best friend, rescued him.

I know, Sir, that to need your goodness is to have a claim on it; may I, therefore, beg your patronage to forward me in this affair, till I be appointed to a division; where, by the help of rigid economy, I will try to support that independence so dear to my soul, but which has been too often so distant from my situation.

R. B.



No. CXXIX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

EDINBURGH, 12th February, 1788.

SOME things in your late letters hurt me; not that *you say them*, but that *you mistake me*. Religion, my honoured Madam, has not only been all my life my chief dependence, but my dearest enjoyment. I have indeed been the luckless victim of wayward follies; but, alas! I have ever been "more fool than knave." A mathematician without religion is a probable character; an irreligious poet is a monster. . . .

R. B.



No. CXXX.

TO THE REV. JOHN SKINNER.

EDINBURGH, February 14, 1788.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

I HAVE been a cripple now near three months, though I am getting vastly better, and have been very much hurried besides, or else I would have wrote you sooner. I must beg your pardon for the epistle you sent me appearing in the Magazine. I had given a copy or two to some of my intimate friends, but did not know of the printing of it till the publication of the Magazine. However, as it does great honour to us both, you will forgive it.

The second volume of the songs I mentioned to you in my last is published to-day. I send you a copy, which I beg you will accept as a mark of the veneration I have long had, and shall ever have, for your character, and of the claim I make to your continued acquaintance. Your songs appear in the third volume, with your name in the index; as I assure you, Sir, I have heard your "Tullochgorum," particularly among our west country-folks, given to many different names, and most commonly to the immortal author of "The Minstrel," who, indeed, never wrote anything superior to "Gie's a sang, Montgomery cried." Your brother has promised me your verses to the Marquis of Huntly's reel, which certainly deserve a place in the collection. My kind host, Mr. Cruikshank, of the High School here, and said to be one of the best Latins in this age, begs me to make you his grateful acknowledgments for the entertainment he has got in a Latin publication of yours, that I borrowed for him from your acquaintance and much respected friend in this place, the Reverend Dr. Webster. Mr. Cruikshank maintains that you write the best Latin since Buchanan. I leave Edinburgh to-morrow, but shall return in three weeks. Your song you mentioned in your last, to the tune of "Dumbarton Drums," and the other, which you say was done by a brother in trade of mine, a ploughman, I shall thank you for a copy of each. I am ever, Reverend Sir, with the most respectful esteem and sincere veneration, yours,

R. B.



No. CXXXI.

TO MR. RICHARD BROWN, GREENOCK.

EDINBURGH, 15th February, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I RECEIVED yours with the greatest pleasure. I shall arrive at Glasgow on Monday evening; and beg, if possible, you will meet me on Tuesday. I shall wait on you Tuesday all day. I shall be found at Durie's Black Bull Inn. I am hurried as if hunted by fifty devils, else I should go to Greenock; but if you cannot possibly come, write me, if possible, to Glasgow on Monday, or direct to me at Mossgiel by Mauchline, and name a day and place in Ayrshire, within a fortnight from this date, where I may meet you. I only stay a fortnight in Ayrshire, and return to Edinburgh. I am ever, my dearest friend, yours,

R. B.

No. CXXXII.

TO MISS MARGARET CHALMERS.

EDINBURGH, *Sunday, February 17, 1788.*

To-morrow, my dear Madam, I leave Edinburgh. I have altered all my plans of future life. A farm that I could live in I could not find; and indeed, after the necessary support my brother and the rest of the family required, I could not venture on farming in that style suitable to my feelings. You will condemn me for the next step I have taken: I have entered into the Excise. I stay in the west about three weeks, and then return to Edinburgh for six weeks' instructions; afterwards, for I get employ instantly, I go *où il plaît à Dieu—et mon roi*. I have chosen this, my dear Friend, after mature deliberation. The question is not at what door of Fortune's palace shall we enter in, but what doors does she open to us? I was not likely to get anything to do. I wanted *un bât*, which is a dangerous, an unhappy situation. I got this without any hanging on, or mortifying solicitation; it is immediate bread; and though poor in comparison of the last eighteen months of my existence, 'tis luxury in comparison of all my preceding life. Besides, the Commissioners are some of them my acquaintances, and all of them my firm friends.

R. B.



No. CXXXIII.

TO MRS. ROSE, OF KILRAVOCK.*

EDINBURGH, *17th February, 1788.*

MADAM,

YOU are much indebted to some indispensable business I have had on my hands, otherwise my gratitude threatened such a return for your obliging favour as would have tired your patience. It but poorly expresses my feelings to say, that I am sensible of your kindness; it may be said of hearts such as yours is, and such, I hope, mine is, much more justly than Addison applies it—

"Some souls by instinct to each other turn."

There was something in my reception at Kilravock so different from the cold, obsequious, dancing-school bow of politeness, that it almost got into my head that friendship had occupied her ground without the intermediate march

* See LIFE.

of acquaintance. I wish I could transcribe, or rather transfuse into language, the glow of my heart when I read your letter. My ready fancy, with colours more mellow than life itself, painted the beautifully wild scenery of Kilravock, the venerable grandeur of the castle; the spreading woods, the winding river, gladly leaving his unsightly, heathly source, and lingering with apparent delight as he passes the fairy walk at the bottom of the garden; your late distressful anxieties, your present enjoyments, your dear little angel, the pride of your hopes; my aged friend, venerable in worth and years, whose loyalty and other virtues will strongly entitle her to the support of the Almighty Spirit here, and His peculiar favour in a happier state of existence. You cannot imagine, Madam, how much such feelings delight me: they are my dearest proofs of my own immortality. Should I never revisit the north, as probably I never will, nor again see your hospitable mansion, were I, some twenty years hence, to see your little fellow's name making a proper figure in a newspaper paragraph, my heart would bound with pleasure.

I am assisting a friend in a collection of Scottish songs, set to their proper tunes; every air worth preserving is to be included: among others I have given "Morag," and some few Highland airs which pleased me most, a dress which will be more generally known, though far, far inferior in real merit. As a small mark of my grateful esteem, I beg leave to present you with a copy of the work so far as it is printed: the "Man of Feeling," that first of men, has promised to transmit it by the first opportunity.

I beg to be remembered most respectfully to my venerable friend, and to your little Highland chieftain. When you see the "two fair spirits of the hill," at Kildrummie,† tell them that I have done myself the honour of setting myself down as one of their admirers for at least twenty years to come, consequently they must look upon me as an acquaintance for the same period; but as the Apostle Paul says, "this I ask of grace, not of debt." I have the honour to be, Madam, &c.,

R. B.



No. CXXXIV.

TO MR. RICHARD BROWN, GREENOCK.

MOSSGIEL, *24th February, 1788.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I CANNOT get the proper direction for my friend in Jamaica, but the following will do:—To Mr.

† Miss Sophia Brodie, of N——, and Miss Rose of Kilravock.

Jo. Hutchinson, at Jo. Brownrigg's, Esq., care of Mr. Benjamin Henriquez, merchant, Orange Street, Kingston. I arrived here at my brother's only yesterday, after fighting my way through Paisley and Kilmarnock against those old powerful foes of mine, the devil, the world, and the flesh—so terrible in the fields of dissipation. I have met with few incidents in my life which gave me so much pleasure as meeting you in Glasgow. There is a time of life beyond which we cannot form a tie worth the name of friendship. "O youth! enchanting stage, profusely blest." Life is a fairy scene; almost all that deserves the name of enjoyment or pleasure is only a charming delusion; and in comes repining age in all the gravity of hoary wisdom, and wretchedly chases away the bewitching phantom. When I think of life, I resolve to keep a strict look-out in the course of economy, for the sake of worldly convenience and independence of mind: to cultivate intimacy with a few of the companions of youth, that they may be the friends of age; never to refuse my liquorish humour a handful of the sweetmeats of life, when they come not too dear; and, for futurity—

"The present moment is our aim,
The niest we never saw!"

How like you my philosophy? Give my best compliments to Mrs. B., and believe me to be, my dear Sir, yours most truly,

R. B.



No. CXXXV.

TO MR. WILLIAM CRUIKSHANK.

MAUCHLINE, 3rd March, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

APOLOGIES for not writing are frequently like apologies for not singing—the apology better than the song. I have fought my way severely through the savage hospitality of this country, to send every guest drunk to bed if they can.

I executed your commission in Glasgow, and I hope the cocoa came safe. 'Twas the same price and the very same kind as your former parcel, for the gentleman recollected your buying there perfectly well.

I should return my thanks for your —— hospitality (I leave a blank for the epithet, as I know none can do it justice) to a poor, wayfaring bard, who was spent and almost overpowered fighting with prosaic wickedness in high places; but I am afraid lest you should burn the letter whenever you come to the passage, so I pass over

it in silence. I am just returned from visiting Mr. Miller's farm. The friend whom I told you I would take with me* was highly pleased with the farm; and as he is, without exception, the most intelligent farmer in the country, he has staggered me a good deal. I have the two plans of life before me; I shall balance them to the best of my judgment, and fix on the most eligible. I have written Mr. Miller, and shall wait on him when I come to town, which shall be the beginning or middle of next week; I would be in sooner, but my unlucky knee is rather worse, and I fear for some time will scarcely stand the fatigue of my Excise instructions. I only mention these ideas to you; and, indeed, except Mr. Ainslie, whom I intend writing to to-morrow, I will not write at all to Edinburgh till I return to it. I would send my compliments to Mr. Nicol, but he would be hurt if he knew I wrote to anybody and not to him: so I shall only beg my best, kindest, kindest compliments to my worthy hostess and the sweet little Rose-bud.

So soon as I am settled in the routine of life, either as an Excise-officer or as a farmer, I propose myself great pleasure from a regular correspondence with the only man almost I ever saw who joined the most attentive prudence with the warmest generosity.

I am much interested for that best of men, Mr. Wood; I hope he is in better health and spirits than when I saw him last. I am ever, my dearest friend, your obliged, humble servant,

R. B.



No. CXXXVI.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE,

AT MR. SAMUEL MITCHELSON'S, W.S., CARRUBBER'S CLOSE,
EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 3rd March, 1788.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM just returned from Mr. Miller's farm. My old friend whom I took with me was highly pleased with the bargain, and advised me to accept of it. He is the most intelligent, sensible farmer in this county, and his advice has staggered me a good deal. I have the two plans before me. I shall endeavour to balance them to the best of my judgment, and fix on the most eligible. On the whole, I find Mr. Miller in the same favourable disposition as when I saw him last; I shall in all probability turn farmer.

* This was James Tennant of Glenconner, to whom one of his poetical epistles is addressed.

I have been through sore tribulation, and under much buffeting of the Wicked One, since I came to this country. JEAN I found banished, like a martyr—forlorn, destitute, and friendless; all for the good old cause. I have reconciled her to her fate; I have reconciled her to her mother; I have taken her a room: I have taken her to my arms; I have given her a mahogany bed; I have given her a guinea; and I have embraced her till she rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But—as I always am on every occasion—I have been prudent and cautious to an astounding degree; I swore her, privately and solemnly, never to attempt any claim on me as a husband, even though any body should persuade her she had such a claim, which she had not, neither during my life, nor after my death. She did all this like a good girl, and . . . O! what a peacemaker is, &c., &c. . .

I shall be in Edinburgh the middle of next week. My farming ideas I shall keep private till I see. I got a letter from Clarinda yesterday, and she tells me she has got no letter of mine but one. Tell her that I wrote to her from Glasgow, from Kilmarnock, from Mauchline, and yesterday from Cumnock as I returned from Dumfries. Indeed, she is the only person in Edinburgh I have written to till this day. How are your soul and body putting up?—a little like man and wife, I suppose. Your faithful friend,

R. B.



No. CXXXVII.

TO —————.*

MAUCHLINE, 7th March, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

My life, since I saw you last, has been one continued hurry; that savage hospitality which knocks a man down with strong liquors is the devil. I have a sore warfare in this world—the devil, the world, and the flesh are three formidable foes. The first, I generally try to fly from; the second, alas! generally flies from me; but the third is my plague—worse than the ten plagues of Egypt.

I have been looking over several farms in this country; one in particular, in Nithsdale, pleased me so well, that if my offer to the proprietor is accepted, I shall commence farmer at Whitsunday. If farming do not appear eligible, I shall have recourse to my other shift; but this to a friend.

I set out for Edinburgh, on Monday morning; how long I stay there is uncertain, but you will know so soon

* As the address on this letter was torn off, the person to whom it was sent can only be conjectured.

as I can inform you myself. However, I determine poesy must be laid aside for some time; my mind has been vitiated by idleness, and it will take a good deal of effort to habituate it to the routine of business. I am ever, my dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.



No. CXXXVIII.

TO MR. RICHARD BROWN.

MAUCHLINE, 7th March, 1788.

I HAVE been out of the country, my dear Friend, and have not had an opportunity of writing till now, when I am afraid you will be gone out of the country too. I have been looking at farms, and, after all, perhaps I may settle in the character of a farmer. I have got so vicious a bent to idleness, and have ever been so little a man of business, that it will take no ordinary effort to bring my mind properly into the routine: but you will say a “great effort is worthy of you.” I say so myself, and butter up my vanity with all the stimulating compliments I can think of. Men of grave, geometrical minds, the sons of “which was to be demonstrated,” may cry up reason as much as they please; but I have always found an honest passion, or native instinct, the truest auxiliary in the warfare of this world. Reason almost always comes to me like an unlucky wife to a poor devil of a husband—just in sufficient time to add her reproaches to his other grievances.

I found Jean with her cargo very well laid in, but unfortunately moored almost at the mercy of wind and tide. I have towed her into a convenient harbour, where she may lie snug till she unload, and have taken the command myself, not ostensibly, but for a time in secret. I am gratified with your kind inquiries after her; as, after all, I may say with Othello—

“Excellent wretch,

Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee!”

I go for Edinburgh on Monday. Yours,

R. B.



No. CXXXIX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

MOSSGIEL, 7th March, 1788.

MADAM,

THE last paragraph in yours of the 30th February affected me most, so I shall begin my answer

where you ended your letter. That I am often a sinner with any little wit I have, I do confess : but I have taxed my recollection to no purpose, to find out when it was employed against you. I hate an ungenerous sarcasm a great deal worse than I do the devil, at least as Milton describes him ; and though I may be rascally enough to be sometimes guilty of it myself, I cannot endure it in others. You, my honoured friend, who cannot appear in any light but you are sure of being respectable—you can afford to pass by an occasion to display your wit, because you may depend for fame on your sense ; or, if you choose to be silent, you know you can rely on the gratitude of many and the esteem of all. But, God help us, who are wits or wittlings by profession, if we stand not for fame there, we sink unsupported !

I am highly flattered by the news you tell me of Coila.* I may say to the fair painter who does me so much honour, as Dr. Beattie says to Ross the poet of his muse Scotia, from which, by the bye, I took the idea of Coila : 'Tis a poem of Beattie's in the Scots dialect, which perhaps you have never seen :—

"Ye shak' your head, but o' my fegs,
Ye've set auld Scotia on her legs :
Lang had she lien wi' bufs and flegs,
Bombaz'd and dizzie,
Her fiddle wanted strings and pegs,
Wae 's me, poor hizzie."

R. B.



No. CXL.

TO MR. ROBERT MUIR, KILMARNOCK.

MOSSGIEL, 7th March, 1788.

I HAVE partly changed my ideas, my dear friend, since I saw you. I took old Glenconner with me to Mr. Miller's farm, and he was so pleased with it, that I have wrote an offer to Mr. Miller, which, if he accepts, I shall sit down a plain farmer—the happiest of lives when a man can live by it. In this case I shall not stay in Edinburgh above a week. I set out on Monday, and would have come by Kilmarnock ; but there are several small sums owing me for my first edition about Galston and Newmills, and I shall set off so early as to dispatch my business and reach Glasgow by night. When I return, I shall devote a forenoon or two to make some kind of acknowledgment for all the kindness I owe your friend—

* Referring to a sketch of Coila in the Vision, by Rachel Dunlop, daughter of Mrs. Dunlop, afterwards Mrs. Robert Glasgow.

ship. Now that I hope to settle with some credit and comfort at home, there was not any friendship or friendly correspondence that promised me more pleasure than yours ; I hope I will not be disappointed. I trust the spring will renew your shattered frame, and make your friends happy. You and I have often agreed that life is no great blessing on the whole. The close of life, indeed, to a reasoning eye, is

"Dark as was Chaos, ere the infant sun
Was roll'd together, or had try'd his beams
Athwart the gloom profound."

But an honest man has nothing to fear. If we lie down in the grave, the whole man a piece of broke machinery, to moulder with the clods of the valley, be it so ; at least there is an end of pain, care, woes, and wants : if that part of us called Mind does survive the apparent destruction of the man—away with the old-wife prejudices and tales ! Every age and every nation has had a different set of stories ; and as the many are always weak, of consequence, they have often, perhaps always, been deceived. A man conscious of having acted an honest part among his fellow-creatures—even granting that he may have been the sport at times of passions and instincts—he goes to a great unknown Being, who could have no other end in giving him existence but to make him happy ; who gave him those passions and instincts, and well knows their force.

These, my worthy friend, are my ideas ; and I know they are not far different from yours. It becomes a man of sense to think for himself, particularly in a case where all men are equally interested, and where, indeed, all men are equally in the dark.

Those copies of mine you have on hand, please send ten of them to Mr. John Ballantine, of the Bank in Ayr : for the remainder, I'll write you about them from Glasgow.

Adieu, my dear Sir ; God send us a cheerful meeting !

R. B.



No. CXLI.

MISS MARGARET CHALMERS, HARVIESTON.

EDINBURGH, 14th March, 1788.

I KNOW, my ever dear friend, that you will be pleased with the news, when I tell you I have at last taken a lease of a farm. Yesternight I completed a bargain with Mr. Miller, of Dalswinton, for the farm of Ellisland, on the banks of the Nith, between five and six miles above

Dumfries. I begin at Whitsunday to build a house, drive lime, &c., and heaven be my help! for it will take a strong effort to bring my mind into the routine of business. I have discharged all the army of my former pursuits, fancies, and pleasures; a motley host! and have literally and strictly retained only the ideas of a few friends, which I have incorporated into a life-guard. I trust in Dr. Johnson's observation, "Where much is attempted, something is done." Firmness, both in sufferance and exertion, is a character I would wish to be thought to possess; and have always despised the whining yelp of complaint, and the cowardly, feebly, resolve. . . .

Poor Miss K.* is ailing a good deal this winter, and begged me to remember her to you the first time I wrote to you. Surely woman, amiable woman, is often made in vain. Too delicately formed for the rougher pursuits of ambition; too noble for the dirt of avarice, and even too gentle for the rage of pleasure—formed indeed for, and highly susceptible of enjoyment and rapture; but that enjoyment, alas! almost wholly at the mercy of the caprice, malevolence, stupidity, or wickedness of an animal at all times comparatively unfeeling, and often brutal.



No. CXLII.

TO MR. RICHARD BROWN, GREENOCK.

GLASGOW, 26th March, 1788.

I AM monstrously to blame, my dear Sir, in not writing to you and sending you the Directory. I have been getting my tack extended, as I have taken a farm; and I have been racking shop accounts with Mr. Creech, both of which, together with watching, fatigue, and a load of care almost too heavy for my shoulders, have in some degree actually fevered me. I really forgot the Directory yesterday, which vexed me; but I was convulsed with rage a great part of the day. I have to thank you for the ingenious, friendly, and elegant epistle from your friend Mr. Crawford. I shall certainly write to him, but not now. This is merely a card to you, as I am posting to Dumfriesshire, where many perplexing arrangements await me. I am vexed about the Directory; but, my dear Sir, forgive me: these eight days I have been positively crazed. My compliments to Mrs. B. I shall write to you at Grenada. I am ever, my dearest friend, yours,

R. B.

* Miss Kennedy, sister of Mrs. Gavin Hamilton. She lived till over ninety, and on breaking her arm by a fall expressed gratitude that it was not her leg, for then she would have been lame for life.

No. CXLIII.

TO MR. ROBERT CLEGHORN, EDINBURGH.†

MAUCHLINE, 31st March, 1788.

YESTERDAY, my dear Sir, as I was riding through a track of melancholy, joyless muirs, between Galloway and Ayrshire, it being Sunday, I turned my thoughts to psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs; and your favourite air, "Captain O'Kean," coming at length into my head, I tried these words to it. You will see that the first part of the tune must be repeated:—

"The small birds rejoice in the green leaves returning,
The murmuring streamlet winds clear thro' the vale;
The hawthorn-trees blow in the dew of the morning,
And wild scatter'd cowslips bedeck the green dale."‡

I am tolerably pleased with these verses; but as I have only a sketch of the tune, I leave it with you to try if they suit the measure of the music.

I am so harassed with care and anxiety about this farming project of mine, that my muse has degenerated into the veriest prose-wench that ever picked cinders or followed a tinker. When I am fairly got into the routine of business, I shall trouble you with a longer epistle, perhaps with some queries respecting farming; at present, the world sits such a load on my mind that it has effaced almost every trace of the poet in me.

My very best compliments and best wishes to Mrs. Cleghorn.

R. B.



No. CXLIV.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON.

MOSSGIEL, Friday Morning.

THE language of refusal is to me the most difficult language on earth, and you are the man in the world, excepting one of Right Honourable designation, to whom it gives me the greatest pain to hold such language. My brother has already got money, and shall want nothing in my power to enable him to fulfil his engagement with you; but to be security on so large a scale, even for a brother, is what I dare not do, except I were in such circumstances of life as that the worst that might happen could not greatly injure me.

† Mr. Cleghorn, a farmer and a musical amateur. He took Burns' advice, and set the verses to music, as "The Chevalier's Lament."

‡ See vol. i. p. 141.

I never wrote a letter which gave me so much pain in my life, as I know the unhappy consequences; I shall incur the displeasure of a gentleman for whom I have the highest respect, and to whom I am deeply obliged. I am ever, Sir, your obliged and very humble servant,

R. B.



No. CXLV.

TO MR. WILLIAM DUNBAR, EDINBURGH.*

MAUCHLINE, 7th April, 1788.

I HAVE not delayed so long to write you, my much respected friend, because I thought no further of my promise. I have long since given up that kind of formal correspondence, where one sits down irksomely to write a letter, because we are in duty bound to do so.

I have been roving over the country, as the farm I have taken is forty miles from this place, hiring servants and preparing matters; but most of all, I am earnestly busy to bring about a revolution in my own mind. As, till within these eighteen months, I never was the wealthy master of ten guineas, my knowledge of business is to learn; add to this, my late scenes of idleness and dissipation have enervated my mind to an alarming degree. Skill in the sober science of life is my most serious and hourly study. I have dropt all conversation and all reading (prose reading) but what tends in some way or other to my serious aim. Except one worthy young fellow, I have not a single correspondent in Edinburgh. You have indeed kindly made me an offer of that kind. The world of wits, and *gens comme il faut* which I lately left, and with whom I never again will intimately mix—from that port, Sir, I expect your Gazette: what *les beaux esprits* are saying, what they are doing, and what they are singing. Any sober intelligence from my sequestered walks of life; any droll original; any passing remark, important, forsooth, because it is mine; any little poetic effort, however embryoth; these, my dear Sir, are all you have to expect from me. When I talk of poetic efforts, I must have it always understood, that I appeal from your wit and taste to your friendship and good nature. The first would be my favourite tribunal, where I defied censure; but the last, where I declined justice.

I have scarcely made a single distich since I saw you. When I meet with an old Scots air, that has any facetious idea in its name, I have a peculiar pleasure in following out that idea for a verse or two.

* Mr. Dunbar, Writer to the Signet, and member of the Crochallan Fencible Club, is the hero of the song "Rattlin Roaring Willie."

I trust that this will find you in better health than I did the last time I called for you. A few lines from you, directed to me, at Mauchline, were it but to let me know how you are, will ease my mind a good deal. Now, never shun the idea of writing me because perhaps you may be out of spirits. I could give you a hundred good consequences attending a dull letter; one, for example, and the remaining ninety-nine some other time—it will always serve to keep in countenance, my much respected Sir, your obliged friend and humble servant,

R. B.



No. CXLVI.

TO MISS MARGARET CHALMERS.

MAUCHLINE, 7th April, 1788.

I AM indebted to you and Miss Nimmo for letting me know Miss Kennedy. Strange! how apt we are to indulge prejudice in our judgments of one another! Even I, who pique myself on my skill in marking characters—because I am too proud of my character as a man to be dazzled in my judgment for glaring wealth, and too proud of my situation as a poor man to be biassed against squalid poverty—I was unacquainted with Miss K.'s very uncommon worth.

I am going on a good deal progressive in *mon grand bât*, the sober science of life. I have lately made some sacrifices, for which, were I *vivâ voce* with you to paint the situation and recount the circumstances, you would applaud me.†

R. B.



No. CXLVII.

TO MR. JAMES SMITH, AVON PRINTFIELD, LINLITHGOW.

MAUCHLINE, April 28, 1788.

BEWARE of your Strasburgh, my good Sir! Look on this as the opening of a correspondence, like the opening of a twenty-four gun battery!

There is no understanding a man properly, without knowing sometimes of his previous ideas—that is to say, if the man has any ideas; for I know many who, in the

† Alluding to his intentions to Jean.

animal-muster, pass for men, that are the scanty masters of only one idea on any given subject, and by far the greatest part of your acquaintances and mine can barely boast of ideas, 1'25—1'5—1'75, or some such fractional matter. So to let you a little into the secrets of my pericranium, there is, you must know, a certain clean-limbed, handsome, bewitching young hussy of your acquaintance, to whom I have lately and privately given a matrimonial title to my corpus.

"Bode a robe and wear it,
Bode a pock and bear it."

says the wise old Scots adage! I hate to presage ill-luck; and as my girl has been *doubly* kinder to me than even the best of women usually are to their partners of our sex, in similar circumstances, I reckon on twelve times a brace of children against I celebrate my twelfth wedding-day: these twenty-four will give me twenty-four gossipings, twenty-four christenings (I mean one equal to two), and I hope, by the blessing of the God of my fathers, to make them twenty-four dutiful children to their parents, twenty-four useful members of society, and twenty-four approved servants to their God! . . .

"Light's heartsome," qu' the wife when she was stealing sheep. You see what a lamp I have hung up to lighten your paths, when you are idle enough to explore the combinations and relations of my ideas. 'Tis now as plain as a pike-staff, why a twenty-four gun battery was a metaphor I could readily employ.

Now for business. I intend to present Mrs. Burns with a printed shawl, an article of which I dare say you have variety: 'tis my first present to her since I have irrevocably called her mine, and I have a kind of whimsical wish to get the first said present from an old and valued friend of hers and mine, a trusty Trojan, whose friendship I count myself possessed of as a life-rent lease.

Look on this letter as a "beginning of sorrows;" I will write you till your eyes ache reading nonsense.

Mrs. Burns* ('tis only her private designation) begs her best compliments to you.

R. B.



No. CXLVIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, 28th April, 1788.

MADAM,

YOUR powers of prehension must be great indeed, as I assure you they made my heart ache with

* First indication of Burns recognizing Jean as his wife.
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penitential pangs, even though I was really not guilty. As I commence farmer at Whitsunday, you will easily guess I must be pretty busy; but that is not all. As I got the offer of the Exeise business without solicitation, and as it cost me only six weeks' attendance for instructions, to entitle me for a commission—which commission lies by me, and at any future period, on my simple petition, can be resumed—I thought five-and-thirty pounds a year was no bad *dernier ressort* for a poor poet, if fortune in her jade tricks should kick him down from the little eminence to which she has lately helped him up.

For this reason I am at present attending these instructions, to have them completed before Whitsunday. Still, Madam, I prepared with the sincerest pleasure to meet you at the Mount, and came to my brother's on Saturday night, to set out on Sunday; but for some nights preceding I had slept in an apartment, where the force of the winds and rains was only mitigated by being sifted through numberless apertures in the windows, walls, &c. In consequence I was on Sunday, Monday, and part of Tuesday, unable to stir out of bed, with all the miserable effects of a violent cold.

You see, Madam, the truth of the French maxim, *Le vrai n'est pas toujours le vrai-semblable*; your last was so full of expostulation, and was something so like the language of an offended friend, that I began to tremble for a correspondence, which I had with grateful pleasure set down as one of the greatest enjoyments of my future life. . . .

Your books have delighted me: Virgil, Dryden, and Tasso were all equally strangers to me; but of this more at large in my next.

R. B.



No. CXLIX.

TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

MAUCHLINE, 3rd May, 1788.

SIR,

I INCLOSE you one or two more of my bagatelles. If the fervent wishes of honest gratitude have any influence with that great unknown Being, who frames the chain of causes and events, prosperity and happiness will attend your visit to the continent, and return you safe to your native shore.

Wherever I am, allow me, Sir, to claim it as my privilege to acquaint you with my progress in my trade of rhymes; as I am sure I could say it with truth, that, next to my little fame, and the having it in my power to make life more comfortable to those whom nature has made

dear to me, I shall ever regard your countenance, your patronage, your friendly good offices, as the most valued consequence of my late success in life. I have the honour to be, most truly, Sir, your much indebted humble servant,

R. B.



No. CL.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, 4th May, 1788.

MADAM,

DRYDEN'S Virgil has delighted me. I do not know whether the critics will agree with me, but the Georgics are to me by far the best of Virgil. It is indeed a species of writing entirely new to me, and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation: but, alas! when I read the Georgics, and then survey my own powers, 'tis like the idea of a Shetland pony, drawn up by the side of a thorough-bred hunter, to start for the plate. I own I am disappointed in the *Æneid*. Faultless correctness may please, and does highly please, the lettered critic: but to that awful character I have not the most distant pretensions. I do not know whether I do not hazard my pretensions to be a critic of any kind when I say that I think Virgil, in many instances, a servile copier of Homer. If I had the *Odyssey* by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved, Homer. Nor can I think there is any thing of this owing to the translators; for, from every thing I have seen of Dryden, I think him, in genius and fluency of language, Pope's master. I have not perused Tasso enough to form an opinion: in some future letter, you shall have my ideas of him; though I am conscious my criticisms must be very inaccurate and imperfect, as there I have ever felt and lamented my want of learning most.

R. B.



No. CLI.

TO MR. SAMUEL BROWN, KIRKOSWALD.

MOSSGIEL, 4th May, 1788.

DEAR UNCLE,

THIS, I hope, will find you and your conjugal yoke-fellow in your good old way. I am impatient to

know if the Ailsa fowling be commenced for this season yet, as I want three or four stones of feathers, and I hope you will bespeak them for me. It would be a vain attempt for me to enumerate the various transactions I have been engaged in since I saw you last; but this know—I engaged in a *smuggling trade*, and God knows if ever any poor man experienced better returns—two for one: but as freight and delivery have turned out so dear, I am thinking of taking out a licence, and beginning in fair trade.

I have taken a farm on the borders of the Nith, and in imitation of the old patriarchs, get men-servants and maid-servants, and flocks and herds, and beget sons and daughters. Your obedient nephew,

R. B.



No. CLII.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, ENGRAVER,
EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 25th May, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AM really uneasy about that money which Mr. Creech owes me per note in your hand, and I want it much at present as I am engaging in business pretty deeply both for myself and my brother. A hundred guineas can be but a trifling affair to him, and 'tis a matter of most serious importance to me. To-morrow I begin my operations as a farmer, and God speed the plough!

I am so enamoured of a certain girl's prolific, twin-bearing merit, that I have given her a legal title to the best blood in my body, and so farewell rakery! To be serious, I found I had a long and much loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my hands; and though Pride and seeming Justice were murderous King's Advocates on the one side, yet Humanity, Generosity, and Forgiveness, were such powerful, such irresistible council on the other side, that a jury of all Endearments and new attachments brought in a unanimous verdict *Not Guilty!* And the Panel, be it known unto all whom it concerns, is installed and instated into all the rights, privileges, immunities, franchises, services, and paraphernalia that at present do, or at any time coming may, belong to the name, title, and designation. [MS. torn away here.]

Present my best compliments to

R. B.

No. CLIII.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

MAUCHLINE, *May 26, 1788.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM two kind letters in your debt; but I have been from home, and horribly busy, buying and preparing for my farming business, over and above the plague of my Excise instructions, which this week will finish.

As I flatter my wishes that I foresee many future years' correspondence between us, 'tis foolish to talk of excusing dull epistles; a dull letter may be a very kind one. I have the pleasure to tell you that I have been extremely fortunate in all my buyings and bargainings hitherto, Mrs. Burns not excepted; which title I now avow to the world. I am truly pleased with this last affair: it has indeed added to my anxieties for futurity, but it has given a stability to my mind and my resolutions unknown before; and the poor girl has the most sacred enthusiasm of attachment to me, and has not a wish but to gratify my every idea of her deportment. I am interrupted. Farewell! my dear Sir.

R. B.



No. CLIV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, *27th May, 1788.*

MADAM,

I HAVE been torturing my philosophy to no purpose, to account for that kind partiality of yours, which unlike . . . , has followed me, in my return to the shade of life, with assiduous benevolence. Often did I regret, in the fleeting hours of my late will-o'-wisp appearance, that "here I had no continuing city;" and, but for the consolation of a few solid guineas, could almost lament the time that a momentary acquaintance with wealth and splendour put me so much out of conceit with the sworn companions of my road through life—insignificance and poverty. . . .

There are few circumstances relating to the unequal distribution of the good things of this life that give me more vexation (I mean in what I see around me) than the importance the opulent bestow on their trifling family affairs, compared with the very same things on the contracted scale of a cottage. Last afternoon I had the honour to spend an hour or two at a good woman's fire-side, where the planks that composed the floor were

decorated with a splendid carpet, and the gay table sparkled with silver and china. 'Tis now about term-day, and there has been a revolution among those creatures,* who, though in appearance partakers, and equally noble partakers, of the same nature with Madame, are from time to time—their nerves, their sinews, their health, strength, wisdom, experience, genius, time, nay a good part of their very thoughts—sold for months and years, . . . not only to the necessities, the conveniences, but, the caprices of the important few. We talked of the insignificant creatures; nay, notwithstanding their general stupidity and raseality, did some of the poor devils the honour to commend them. But light be the turf upon his breast who taught, "Reverence thyself!" We look down on the unpolished wretches, their imperitinent wives and clouterly brats, as the lordly bull does on the little dirty ant-hill, whose puny inhabitants he crushes in the carelessness of his ramble, or tosses in the air in the wantonness of his pride.

R. B.



No. CLV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP,

AT MR. DUNLOP'S, HADDINGTON.

ELLISLAND, *14th June, 1788.*

"Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart, untravell'd, fondly turns to thee;
Still to my friend it turns with ceaseless pain,
And drags, at each remove, a lengthen'd chain."

GOLDSMITH.

THIS is the second day, my honoured friend, that I have been on my farm. A solitary inmate of an old, smoky spence; far from every object I love, or by whom I am beloved; nor any acquaintance older than yesterday, except Jenny Geddes, the old mare I ride on; while uncouth cares and novel plans hourly insult my awkward ignorance and bashful inexperience. There is a foggy atmosphere native to my soul in the hour of care; consequently the dreary objects seem larger than life. Extreme sensibility, irritated and prejudiced on the gloomy side by a series of misfortunes and disappointments, at that period of my existence when the soul is laying in her cargo of ideas for the voyage of life, is, I believe, the principal cause of this unhappy frame of mind.

"The valiant, in himself what can he suffer?
Or what need he regard his *single* woes?" &c.

* The poet here alludes to the hiring-season of servants, which in Scotland is half-yearly.

Your surmise, Madam, is just ; I am indeed a husband.

I found a once much-loved and still much-loved female, literally and truly cast out to the mercy of the naked elements ; but as I enabled her to *purchase* a shelter, and there is no sporting with a fellow-creature's happiness or misery. . . . The most placid good-nature and sweetness of disposition ; a warm heart, gratefully devoted with all its powers to love me ; vigorous health and sprightly cheerfulness, set off to the best advantage by a more than common handsome figure ; these, I think, in a woman, may make a good wife, though she should never have read a page but the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, nor have danced in a brighter assembly than a penny pay wedding.

R. B.



No. CLVI.

EXTRACT FROM THE AUTHOR'S JOURNAL.

ELLISLAND, *Sunday, 15th June, 1788.*

THIS is now the third day that I have been in this country. "Lord ! what is man !" What a bustling little bundle of passions, appetites, ideas, and fancies ! And what a capricious kind of existence he has here ! . . . There is, indeed, an elsewhere, where, as Thomson says, "virtue sole survives."

"Tell us, ye dead ;

Will none of you in pity disclose the secret,

What 'tis you are, and we must shortly be ?

A little time

Will make us wise as you are, and as close."

I am such a coward in life, so tired of the service, that I would almost at any time, with Milton's *Adam*, "gladly lay me in my mother's lap, and be at peace."

But a wife and children bind me to struggle with the stream, till some sudden squall shall overset the silly vessel, or, in the listless return of years, its own craziness reduce it to a wreck. Farewell now to those giddy follies, those varnished vices, which though half sanctified by the bewitching levity of wit and humour, are at best but thriftless idling with the precious current of existence ; nay, often poisoning the whole, that, like the plains of Jericho, "the water is naught, and the ground barren," and nothing short of a supernaturally gifted Elisha can ever heal the evils.

Wedlock—the circumstance that buckles me hardest to care, if virtue and religion were to be anything with me but names—was what in a few seasons I must have

resolved on ; in my present situation it was absolutely necessary. Humanity, generosity, honest pride of character, justice to my own happiness for after-life, so far as it could depend (which it surely will a great deal) on internal peace ; all these joined their warmest suffrages, their most powerful solicitations, with a rooted attachment, to urge the step I have taken. Nor have I any reason on her part to repent it. I can fancy how, but have never seen where, I could have made a better choice. Come then, let me act up to my favourite motto—that glorious passage in Young—

"On reason build resolve,

That column of true majesty in man !"

R. B.



No. CLVII.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, *June 15, 1788.*

THIS is now the third day, my dearest Sir, that I have sojourned in these regions ; and during these three days you have occupied more of my thoughts than in three weeks preceding ; in Ayrshire I have several variations of friendship's compass : here it points invariably to the pole. My farm gives me a good many uncouth cares and anxieties, but I hate the language of complaint. Job, or some one of his friends, says well—"Why should a living man complain ?"

I have lately been much mortified with contemplating an unlucky imperfection in the very framing and construction of my soul ; namely, a blundering inaccuracy of her olfactory organs in hitting the scent of craft or design in my fellow-creatures. I do not mean any compliment to my ingenuousness, or to hint that the defect is in consequence of the unsuspecting simplicity of conscious truth and honour : I take it to be, in some way or other, an imperfection in the mental sight ; or, metaphor apart, some modification of dulness. In two or three small instances lately, I have been most shamefully out.

I have all along hitherto, in the warfare of life, been bred to arms among the light-horse, the piquet-guards of fancy ; a kind of Hussars and Highlanders of the brain ; but I am firmly resolved to sell out of these giddy battalions, who have no ideas of a battle but fighting the foe, or of a siege but storming the town. Cost what it will, I am determined to buy in among the grave squadrons of heavy-armed thought, or the artillery corps of plodding contrivance.

What books are you reading, or what is the subject

of your thoughts, besides the great studies of your profession? You said something about Religion in your last. I don't exactly remember what it was, as the letter is in Ayrshire; but I thought it not only prettily said, but nobly thought. You will make a noble fellow if once you were married. I make no reservation of your being well married; you have so much sense and knowledge of human nature, that though you may not realize perhaps the ideas of romance, yet you will never be ill married.

Were it not for the terrors of my ticklish situation respecting provision for a family of children, I am decidedly of opinion, that the step I have taken is vastly for my happiness.* As it is, I look to the Excise scheme as a certainty of maintenance. A maintenance! A luxury to what either Mrs. Burns or I were born to. Adieu.

R. B.



No. CLVIII.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE, EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 23rd June, 1788.

THIS letter, my dear Sir, is only a business scrap. Mr. Miers, profile painter in your town, has executed a profile of Dr. Blacklock for me: do me the favour to call for it, and sit to him yourself for me, which put in the same size as the doctor's. The account of both profiles will be fifteen shillings, which I have given to James Connel, our Mauchline carrier, to pay you when you give him the parcel. You must not, my friend, refuse to sit. The time is short; when I sat to Mr. Miers, I am sure he did not exceed two minutes. I propose hanging Lord Glencairn, the doctor, and you, in trio, over my new chimney-piece that is to be. Adieu.

R. B.



No. CLIX.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 30th June, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I JUST now received your brief epistle; and, to take vengeance on your laziness, I have, you see, taken a long sheet of writing paper, and have begun at the

* His marriage.

top of the page, intending to scribble on to the very last corner.

I am vexed at that affair of the . . . , but dare not enlarge on the subject until you send me your direction, as I suppose that will be altered on your late master and friend's death.† I am concerned for the old fellow's exit, only as I fear it may be to your disadvantage in any respect—for an old man's dying, except he have been a very benevolent character, or in some particular situation of life that the welfare of the poor or the helpless depended on him, I think it an event of the most trifling moment to the world. Man is naturally a kind, benevolent animal, but he is dropped into such a needy situation here, in this vexatious world, and has such a whoreson, hungry, growling, multiplying pack of necessities, appetites, passions, and desires about him, ready to devour him for want of other food; that in fact he must lay aside his cares for others that he may look properly to himself. You have been imposed upon in paying Mr. Miers for the profile of a Mr. H. I did not mention it in my letter to you, nor did I ever give Mr. Miers any such order. I have no objection to lose the money, but I will *not* have any such profile in my possession.

I desired the carrier to pay you, but as I mentioned only fifteen shillings to him, I will rather enclose you a guinea note. I have it not, indeed, to spare here, as I am only a sojourner in a strange land in this place; but in a day or two I return to Mauchline, and there I have the bank notes through the house like salt permits.

There is a great degree of folly in talking unnecessarily of one's private affairs. I have just now been interrupted by one of my new neighbours, who has made himself absolutely contemptible in my eyes, by his silly, garrulous pruriency. I know it has been a fault of my own, too; but from this moment I abjure it as I would the service of hell! Your poets, spendthrifts, and other fools of that kidney, pretend, forsooth, to crack their jokes on prudence; but 'tis a squalid vagabond glorying in his rags. Still, imprudence respecting money matters is much more pardonable than imprudence respecting character. I have no objection to prefer prodigality to avarice, in some few instances; but I appeal to your observation, if you have not met, and often met, with the same disingenuousness, the same hollow-hearted insincerity, and disintegrative depravity of principle, in the hackneyed victims of profusion, as in the unfeeling children of parsimony. I have every possible reverence for the much talked of world beyond the grave, and I wish that which piety believes, and virtue deserves, may be all matter of fact. But in things belonging to, and terminating in this present

† Mr. Samuel Mitchelson, W.S., Ainslie's master, died on the 21st June, 1788.

scene of existence, man has serious and interesting business on hand. Whether a man shall shake hands with welcome in the distinguished elevation of respect, or shrink from contempt in the abject corner of insignificance; whether he shall wanton under the tropic of plenty, at least enjoy himself in the comfortable latitudes of easy convenience, or starve in the arctic circle of dreary poverty; whether he shall rise in the manly consciousness of a self-approving mind, or sink beneath a galling load of regret and remorse—these are alternatives of the last moment.

You see how I preach. You used occasionally to sermonize too; I wish you would, in charity, favour me with a sheet-full in your own way. I admire the close of a letter Lord Bolingbroke writes to Dean Swift:—"Adieu, dear Swift! with all thy faults, I love thee entirely: make an effort to love me with all mine!" Humble servant, and all that trumpery, is now such a prostituted business, that honest Friendship, in her sincere way, must have recourse to her primitive, simple—farewell!

R. B.



No. CLX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, 10th July, 1788.

MY MUCH HONOURED FRIEND,

YOURS of the 24th June is before me. I found it, as well as another valued friend—my wife—waiting to welcome me to Ayrshire: I met both with the sincerest pleasure.

When I write you, Madam, I do not sit down to answer every paragraph of yours, by echoing every sentiment, like the faithful Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled, answering a speech from the best of kings! I express myself in the fulness of my heart, and may, perhaps, be guilty of neglecting some of your kind inquiries; but not from your very odd reason, that I do not read your letters. All your epistles for several months have cost me nothing, except a swelling throb of gratitude or a deep-felt sentiment of veneration.

Mrs. Burns, Madam, is the identical woman, When she first found herself "as women wish to be who love their lords," as I loved her nearly to distraction, we took steps for a private marriage. Her parents got the hint: and not only forbade me her company and their house, but, on my rumoured West Indian voyage, got a warrant to put me in jail, till I should

find security in my about-to-be paternal relation. You know my lucky reverse of fortune. On my *éclatant* return to Mauchline, I was made welcome to visit my girl. The usual consequences began to betray her; and as I was at that time laid up a cripple in Edinburgh, she was turned, literally turned out of doors, and I wrote to a friend to shelter her till my return, when our marriage was declared. Her happiness or misery were in my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit?

To jealousy or infidelity I am an equal stranger. My preservative against the first is the most thorough consciousness of her sentiments of honour, and her attachment to me: my antidote against the last is my long and deep-rooted affection for her. I can easily fancy a more agreeable companion for my journey of life; but, upon my honour, I have never seen the individual instance. In household matters, of aptness to learn and activity to execute she is eminently mistress; and during my absence in Nithsdale, she is regularly and constantly apprentice to my mother and sisters in their dairy and other rural business. The Muses must not be offended when I tell them, the concerns of my wife and family will, in my mind, always take the *pas*; but I assure them their ladyships will ever come next in place. You are right, that a bachelor state would have insured me more friends; but, from a cause you will easily guess, conscious peace in the enjoyment of my own mind, and unmistrusting confidence in approaching my God, would seldom have been of the number.

Circumstanced as I am, I could never have got a female partner for life, who could have entered into my favourite studies, relished my favourite authors, &c., without probably entailing on me at the same time expensive living, fantastic caprice, perhaps apish affectation, with all the blessed boarding-school acquirements, which (*pardonnez moi, Madame*) are sometimes to be found among females of the upper ranks, but almost universally pervade the misses of the would-be gentry.

I like your way in your church-yard lucubrations. Thoughts that are the spontaneous result of accidental situations, either respecting health, place, or company, have often a strength, and always an originality, that would in vain be looked for in fancied circumstances and studied paragraphs. For me, I have often thought of keeping a letter, in progression, by me, to send you when the sheet was written out. Now I talk of sheets, I must tell you, my reason for writing to you on paper of this kind is my pruriency of writing to you at large. A page of post is on such a dis-social, narrow-minded scale, that I cannot abide it; and double letters, at least in my miscellaneous reverie manner, are a monstrous tax in a close correspondence.

R. B.

No. CLXI.

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER,
EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 18th July, 1788.

YOU injured me, my dear Sir, in your construction of the cause of my silence. From Ellisland in Nithsdale to Mauchline in Kyle is forty and five miles. *There*, a house a-building, and farm enclosures and improvements to tend; *here*, a new—not so much indeed a *new* as a *young* wife: good God, Sir, could my dearest brother expect a regular correspondence from me! I who am busied with the sacred pen of Nature, in the mystic volume of Creation—can I dishonour my hand with a dirty goose-feather, on a parcel of mashed old rags? I who am “called as was Aaron,” to offer in the *sanctum sanctorum*, not indeed the mysterious, bloody types of future MURDER, but the thrice hallowed quintessences of future EXISTENCE—can I—but I have apologized enough. I am certain that you, my liberal-minded and much-respected friend, would have acquitted me, though I had obeyed to the very letter that famous statute among the irrevocable decrees of the Medes and Persians, not to ask petition, for forty days, of either God or man, save thee, O Queen, only!

I am highly obliged to you, my dearest Sir, for your kind, your elegant compliments on my becoming one of that most respectable, that most truly venerable corps, they who are, without a metaphor, the fathers of posterity, the benefactors of all coming generations; the editors of Spiritual Nature, and the authors of Immortal Being. Now that I am “one of you,” I shall humbly but fervently endeavour to be a conspicuous member. Now it is “called to-day” with my powers and me, and the time fast approacheth when, beholding the debilitated victim of all-subduing Time, they shall exclaim, “How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

Your book came safe, and I am going to trouble you with further commissions. I call it troubling you—because I want only *books*; the cheapest way the best; so you may have to hunt for them in the evening auctions. I want Smollett’s works, for the sake of his incomparable humour. I have already “Roderick Random” and “Humphrey Clinker.” “Peregrine Pickle,” “Launcelot Greaves,” and “Ferdinand Count Fathom,” I still want; but as I said, the veriest ordinary copies will serve me. I am nice only in the appearance of my poets. I forget the price of Cowper’s Poems, but I believe I must have them. I saw the other day proposals for a publication entitled “Bank’s New and Complete Christian’s Family

Bible,” printed for C. Cooke, Paternoster Row, London. He promises at least to give in the work, I think it is three hundred and odd engravings, to which he has put the names of the first artists in London. You will know the character of the performance, as some numbers of it are published; and if it is really what it pretends to be, set me down as a subscriber, and send me the published numbers.

Let me hear from you your first leisure minute, and trust me you shall in future have no reason to complain of my silence. The dazzling perplexity of novelty will dissipate, and leave me to pursue my course in the quiet path of methodical routine.

I might go on to fill up the page, but I dare say you are already sufficiently tired of, my dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.



No. CLXII.

TO MR. GEORGE LOCKHART, MERCHANT,
GLASGOW.

MAUCHLINE, 18th July, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AM just going for Nithsdale, else I would certainly have transcribed some of my rhyming things for you. The Miss Baillies I have seen in Edinburgh.* “Fair and lovely are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Who would not praise thee for these thy gifts in thy goodness to the sons of men!” It needed not your fine taste to admire them. I declare, one day I had the honour of dining at Mr. Baillie’s, I was almost in the predicament of the children of Israel, when they could not look on Moses’ face for the glory that shone in it when he descended from Mount Horeb.

I did once write a poetic address from the Falls of Bruar to his grace of Athole, when I was in the Highlands. When you return to Scotland, let me know, and I will send such of my pieces as please myself best. I return to Mauchline in about ten days.

My compliments to Mr. Purden. I am in truth, but at present in haste, yours sincerely,

R. B.

* See the song on Miss Lesley Baillie.

No. CLXIII.

TO MR. ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM, WRITER,
ST. JAMES' SQUARE, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, NITHSDALE, *July 27, 1788.*

"MY GODLIKE FRIEND—

Nay, do not stare,
You think the phrase is odd-like ;
But 'God is Love,' the saints declare—
Then, surely thou art god-like," &c. *

MY spur-galled, spavene'd Pegasus makes so hobbling a progress over the course of Extempore, that I must here alight and try the foot-path of plain prose. I have not met with anything this long while, my dear Sir, that has given my inward man such a fillip as your kind epistle.

For my own Biographical story, I can only say with the venerable Hebrew Patriarch—"Here am I with the children God has given me!" I have been a farmer since Whitsunday, and am just now building a house—not a Palace to attract the train-attended steps of pride-swollen Greatness, but a plain, simple domicile for Humility and Contentment. I am, too, a married man. This was a step of which I had no idea when you and I were together. On my return to Ayrshire, I found a much-loved female's positive happiness or absolute misery among my hands, and I could not trifle with such a sacred deposit. I am, since, doubly pleased with my conduct. I have the consciousness of acting up to that generosity of principle which I would be thought to possess, and I am really more and more pleased with my choice. When I tell you that Mrs. Burns was once "my Jean," you will know the rest. Of four children she bore me in seventeen months, my eldest boy is only living. By the bye, I intend breeding him up for the Church; and from an innate dexterity in secret mischief which he possesses, and a certain hypocritical gravity as he looks on the consequences, I have no small hopes of him in the sacerdotal line.

Mrs. Burns does not come from Ayrshire till my said new house be ready, so I am eight or ten days at Mauchline and this place alternately. Hitherto my direction was only "at Mauchline," but "at Ellisland, near Dumfries," will now likewise find me; though I prefer the former. I need not tell you that I shall expect to hear from you soon. Adieu!

R. B.

Lowe's poem I shall transcribe in my first leisure hour.

R. B.

* See vol. i. p. 150.

No. CLXIV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

MAUCHLINE, *2nd August, 1788.*

HONOURED MADAM,

YOUR kind letter welcomed me yesternight to Ayrshire. I am, indeed, seriously angry with you at the quantum of your luckpenny; but, vexed and hurt as I was, I could not help laughing very heartily at the noble lord's apology for the missed napkin.

I would write you from Nithsdale, and give you my direction there, but I have scarce an opportunity of calling at a post-office once in a fortnight. I am six miles from Dumfries, am scarcely ever in it myself, and as yet have little acquaintance in the neighbourhood. Besides, I am now very busy on my farm, building a dwelling-house; as at present I am almost an evangelical man in Nithsdale, for I have scarce "where to lay my head."

There are some passages in your last that brought tears in my eyes. "The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith." The repository of these "sorrows of the heart" is a kind of *sanctum sanctorum*: and 'tis only a chosen friend, and that, too, at particular, sacred times, who dares enter into them:—

"Heaven oft tears the bosom-chords
That Nature finest strung."

You will excuse the quotation for the sake of the author. Instead of entering on this subject farther, I shall transcribe you a few lines I wrote in a hermitage, belonging to a gentleman in my, Nithsdale, neighbourhood. They are almost the only favours the muses have conferred on me in that country:—

Thou whom chance may hither lead, &c.†

Since I am in the way of transcribing, the following were the production of yesterday as I jogged through the wild hills of New Cumnock. I intended inserting them, or something like them, in an epistle I am going to write to the gentleman on whose friendship my Exercise hopes depend—Mr. Graham of Fintry, one of the worthiest and most accomplished gentlemen, not only of this country, but, I will dare to say it, of this age. The following are just the first crude thoughts "unhousel'd, unanointed, unaneal'd:"—

Pity the tuneful Muses' helpless train,
Weak, timid landsmen on Life's stormy main!
The world were blest, did bliss on them depend;
Ah, that "the friendly e'er should want a friend!"

† See vol. i. pp. 142, 148.

The little Fate bestows they share as soon ;
 Unlike sage, proverb'd Wisdom's hard-wrung boon.
 Let Prudence number o'er each sturdy son,
 Who life and wisdom at one race begun ;
 Who feel by reason and who give by rule
 (Instinct 's a brute and sentiment a fool !);
 Who make poor *will* do wait upon *I should* ;
 We own they 're prudent, but who feels they 're good ?
 Ye wise ones, hence ! ye hurt the social eye ;
 God's image rudely etch'd on base alloy !
 But come, ye *

Here the Muse left me. I am astonished at what you tell me of Anthony's writing me. I never received it. Poor fellow ! you vex me much by telling me that he is unfortunate. I shall be in Ayrshire ten days from this date. I have just room for an old Roman farewell !

R. B.



No. CLXV.

TO MR. ROBERT M'INDOE, MERCHANT,
 GLASGOW.

MAUCHLINE, 5th August, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AM vexed for nothing more, that I have not been at Glasgow, than not meeting with you. I have seldom found my friend Andrew M'Culloch wrong in his ideas of mankind ; but respecting your worship he was as true as Holy Writ. This is the night of our fair, and I, as you see, cannot keep well *in a line*: but if you will send me by the bearer, John Ronald, carrier between Glasgow and Mauchline, fifteen yards of black silk, the same kind as that of which I bought a gown and petticoat from you formerly—lutestring, I think is its name—I shall send you the money and a more coherent letter, when he goes again to your good town. To be brief, send me fifteen yards black lutestring silk, such as they used to make gowns and petticoats of, and I shall choose, some sober morning before breakfast, and write you a sober answer, with the sober sum which will then be due from, dear Sir, fu' or fasting, yours sincerely,

R. B.

* See the whole of this first epistle to Graham of Fintry, vol. i. p. 145.

No. CLXVI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 16th August, 1788.

I AM in a fine disposition, my honoured friend, to send you an elegiac epistle ; and want only genius to make it quite Shenstonian :—

“ Why droops my heart with fancied woes forlorn ?
 Why sinks my soul beneath each wintry sky ? ”

My increasing cares in this, as yet, strange country—gloomy conjectures in the dark vista of futurity—consciousness of my own inability for the struggle of the world—my broadened mark to misfortune in a wife and children ; I could indulge these reflections, till my humour should ferment into the most acid chagrin that would corrode the very thread of life.

To counterwork these baneful feelings, I have sat down to write to you ; as I declare upon my soul I always find that the most sovereign balm for my wounded spirit.

I was yesterday at Mr. Miller's to dinner, for the first time. My reception was quite to my mind : from the lady of the house quite flattering. She sometimes hits on a couplet or two, *impromptu*. She repeated one or two to the admiration of all present. My suffrage, as a professional man, was expected : I for once went agonizing over the belly of my conscience. Pardon me, ye, my adored household gods, independence of spirit and integrity of soul ! In the course of conversation, “ Johnson's Musical Museum,” a collection of Scottish songs with the music, was talked of. We got a song on the harpsichord, beginning,

“ Raving winds around her blowing.” †

The air was much admired : the lady of the house asked me whose were the words. “ Mine, Madam—they are indeed my very best verses ; ” she took not the smallest notice of them ! The old Scottish proverb says well, “ King's caff is better than ither folks' eorn.” I was going to make a New Testament quotation about “ casting pearls,” but that would be too virulent, for the lady is actually a woman of sense and taste.

After all that has been said on the other side of the question, man is by no means a happy creature. I do not speak of the selected few, favoured by partial heaven, whose souls are tuned to gladness amid riches and honours, and prudence and wisdom. I speak of the neglected many, whose nerves, whose sinews, whose days are sold to the minions of fortune.

If I thought you had never seen it, I would transcribe

† See vol. i. p. 137.

for you a stanza of an old Scottish ballad, called "The Life and Age of Man;" beginning thus:—

"'Twas in the sixteen hundred year
Of God and fifty-three
Frae Christ was born, that bought us dear,
As writings testify."

I had an old grand-nucle, with whom my mother lived awhile in her girlish years; the good old man, for such he was, was long blind ere he died; during which time his highest enjoyment was to sit down and cry, while my mother would sing the simple old song of "The Life and Age of Man."*

It is this way of thinking, it is these melancholy truths, that make religion so precious to the poor, miserable children of men. If it is a mere phantom, existing only in the heated imagination of enthusiasm—

"What truth on earth so precious as the lie!"

My idle reasonings sometimes make me a little sceptical, but the necessities of my heart always give the cold philosophisings the lie. Who looks for the heart weaned from earth; the soul affianced to her God; the correspondence fixed with heaven; the pious supplication and devout thanksgiving, constant as the vicissitudes of even and morn; who thinks to meet with them in the court, the palace, in the glare of public life? No; to find them in their precious importance and divine efficacy, we must search among the obscure recesses of disappointment, affliction, poverty, and distress.

I am sure, dear Madam, you are now more than pleased with the length of my letters. I return to Ayrshire middle of next week; and it quickens my pace to think that there will be a letter from you waiting me there. I must be here again very soon for my harvest.

R. B.



No. CLXVII.

TO MR. JOHN BEUGO, ENGRAVER,
EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, *September 9, 1788.*

MY DEAR SIR,

THERE is not in Edinburgh above the number of the Graces whose letters would have given me so much pleasure as yours of the 3rd instant, which only reached me yesternight.

* See the note to the poem, "Man was made to Mourn," v. i. p. 24.

I am here on my farm, busy with my harvest; but for all that most pleasurable part of life called SOCIAL COMMUNICATION, I am here at the very elbow of existence. The only things that are to be found in this country, in any degree of perfection, are stupidity and canting. Pros—they only know in graces, prayers, &c., and the value of these they estimate, as they do their plaiding webs—by the ell! As for the Muses, they have as much an idea of a rhinoceros as a poet. For my old capricious but good-natured hussy of a Muse—

"By banks of Nith I sat and wept
When Coila I thought on,
In midst thereof I hung my harp
The willow trees upon."

I am generally about half my time in Ayrshire with my "darling Jean," and then I, at lucid intervals, throw my horny fist across my be-cobwebbed lyre, much in the same manner as an old wife throws her hand across the spokes of her spinning-wheel.

I will send you the "Fortunate Shepherdess" as soon as I return to Ayrshire, for there I keep it with other precious treasure. I shall send it by a careful hand, as I would not for anything it should be mislaid or lost. I do not wish to serve you from any benevolence, or other grave Christian virtue; 'tis purely a selfish gratification of my own feeling whenever I think of you.

You do not tell me if you are going to be married. Depend upon it, if you do not make some foolish choice, it will be a very great improvement upon the dish of life. I can speak from experience, though, God knows, my choice was as random as blind-man's buff. . . .

If your better functions would give you leisure to write to me, I should be extremely happy; that is to say, if you neither keep nor look for a regular correspondence. I hate the idea of being obliged to write a letter. I sometimes write a friend twice a week, at other times once a quarter.

I am exceedingly pleased with your fancy in making the author you mention place a map of Iceland instead of his portrait before his works;* 'twas a glorious idea.

Could you conveniently do me one thing?—whenever you finish any head, I should like to have a proof copy of it. I might tell you a long story about your fine genius; but, as what every body knows cannot have escaped you, I shall not say one syllable about it.

If you see Mr. Nasmyth, remember me to him most respectfully, as he both loves and deserves respect: though, if he would pay less respect to the mere carcase of greatness, I should think him much nearer perfection.

R. B.

† An allusion to Creech the bookseller.

No. CLXVIII.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, Esq., OF FINTRY.

ENCLOSING A POETICAL EPISTLE.*

ELLISLAND, 10th September, 1788.

SIR,

THE scrapes and premunires into which our indiscretions and follies, in the ordinary constitution of things, often bring us, are bad enough; but it is peculiarly hard that a man's virtues should involve him in disquiet, and the very goodness of his heart cause the persecution of his peace. You, Sir, have patronized and befriended me, not by barren compliments, which merely fed my vanity, or little marks of notice, which perhaps only encumbered me more in the awkwardness of my native rusticity—but by being my persevering friend in real life: and now, as if your continued benevolence had given me a prescriptive right, I am going again to trouble you with my importunities.

Your Honourable Board some time ago gave me my Excise commission, which I regard as my sheet-anchor in life. My farm, now that I have tried it a little, though I think it will in time be a saving bargain, yet does by no means promise to be such a pennyworth as I was taught to expect. It is in the last stage of worn-out poverty, and it will take some time before it pays the rent. I might have had cash to supply the deficiencies of these hungry years; but I have a younger brother and three sisters on a farm in Ayrshire, and it took all my surplus over what I thought necessary for my farming capital, to save not only the comfort, but the very existence of that fireside circle from impending destruction. This was done before I took the farm; and rather than abstract my money from my brother—a circumstance which would ruin him—I will resign the farm, and enter immediately into the service of your Honours. But I am embarked now in the farm; I have commenced married man; and I am determined to stand by the lease till resistless necessity compels me to quit the ground.

There is one way by which I might be enabled to extricate myself from this embarrassment—a scheme which I hope and am certain is in your power to effectuate. I live here, Sir, in the very centre of a country Excise division; the present officer lately lived on a farm which he rented, in my nearest neighbourhood; and as the gentleman, owing to some legacies, is quite opulent, a removal could do him no manner of injury: and on a month's warning to give me a little time to look again over my instructions, I would not be afraid to enter on business. I do not know the name of his division, as I have not yet got acquainted with any of the Dumfries

Excise people; but his own name is Leonard Smith. It would suit me to enter on it beginning of next summer; but I shall be in Edinburgh to wait upon you about the affair, sometime in the ensuing winter.

When I think how and on what I have written to you, Sir, I shudder at my own *hardiesse*. Forgive me, Sir, I have told you my situation. If asking anything less could possibly have done, I would not have asked so much.

If I were in the service, it would likewise favour my poetical schemes. I am thinking of something in the rural way of the drama kind. Originality of character is, I think, the most striking beauty in that species of composition, and my wanderings in the way of my business would be vastly favourable to my picking up original traits of human nature.

I again, Sir, earnestly beg your forgiveness for this letter. I have done violence to my own feelings in writing it.

“If I in aught have done amiss,
Impute it not!”

My thoughts on this business, as usual with me when my mind is burdened, vented themselves in the enclosed verses, which I have taken the liberty to inscribe to you.

You, Sir, have the power to bless; but the only claim I have to your friendly offices is my having already been the object of your goodness, which [seems much like] producing my debt instead of my discharge.

I am sure I go on Scripture grounds in this affair, for I “ask in faith, nothing doubting;” and for the true Scripture reason too, because I have the fullest conviction that “my benefactor is good.”

I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply indebted humble servant,

R. B.



No. CLXIX.

TO MRS. ROBERT BURNS, MAUCHLINE.

ELLISLAND, Friday, 12th September, 1788.

MY DEAR LOVE,

I RECEIVED your kind letter with a pleasure which no letter but one from you could have given me. I dreamed of you the whole night last; but alas! I fear it will be three weeks yet, ere I can hope for the happiness of seeing you. My harvest is going on. I have some to cut down still, but I put in two stacks to-day, so I'm as tired as a dog.

You might get one of Gilbert's sweet milk cheeses,

* See “Epistle to Mr. Graham,” vol. i. p. 145.

and send it to On second thoughts, I believe you had best get the half of Gilbert's web of table linen, and make it up; tho' I think it damnable dear, but it is no outlaid money to us, you know. I have just now consulted my old landlady about table linen, and she thinks I may have the best for two shillings per yard; so after all, let it alone until I return; and some day next week I will be in Dumfries, and will ask the price there. I expect your new gowns will be very forward, or ready to make, against I be home to get the baiveridge. I have written my long-thought-on letter to Mr. Graham, the Commissioner of Excise; and have sent sheetful of Poetry besides. Now I talk of poetry, I had strathspey among my hands to make verses to, for Johnson's Collection, which I*

R. B.



No. CLXX.

TO MISS MARGARET CHALMERS, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES,
September 16, 1788.

WHERE are you? and how are you? and is Lady Mackenzie recovering her health? for I have had but one solitary letter from you. I will not think you have forgot me, Madam; and, for my part—

"When thee, Jerusalem, I forget,
Skill part from my right hand!"

"My heart is not of that rock, nor my soul careless as that sea." I do not make my progress among mankind as a bowl does among its fellows—rolling through the crowd without bearing away any mark or impression, except where they hit in hostile collision.

I am here, driven in with my harvest folks by bad weather; and as you and your sister once did me the honour of interesting yourselves much *à l'égard de moi*, I sit down to beg the continuation of your goodness. I can truly say that, all the exterior of life apart, I never saw two whose esteem flattered the nobler feelings of my soul—I will not say more, but so much, as Lady Mackenzie and Miss Chalmers. When I think of you—hearts the best, minds the noblest of human kind, unfortunate even in the shades of life—when I think I have met with you, and have lived more of real life with you in eight days than I can do with almost anybody I meet with in eight

* The original of the above is possessed by Mr. Andrew Nicolson, Dumfries. It is, however, very much damaged, and the latter portion is torn away.

years—when I think on the improbability of meeting you in this world again—I could sit down and cry like a child! If ever you honoured me with a place in your esteem, I trust I can now plead more desert. I am secure against that crushing grip of iron poverty, which, alas! is less or more fatal to the native worth and purity of, I fear, the noblest souls; and a late important step in my life has kindly taken me out of the way of those ungrateful iniquities, which, however overlooked in fashionable licence, or varnished in fashionable phrase, are indeed but lighter and deeper shades of VILLAINY.

Shortly after my last return to Ayrshire, I married "my Jean." This was not in consequence of the attachment of romance, perhaps; but I had a long and much loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery in my determination, and I durst not trifle with so important a deposit. Nor have I any cause to repent it. If I have not got polite tattle, modish manners, and fashionable dress, I am not sickened and disgusted with the multiform curse of boarding-school affectation; and I have got the handsomest figure, the sweetest temper, the soundest constitution, and the kindest heart in the county. Mrs. Burns believes, as firmly as her creed, that I am *le plus bel esprit et le plus honnête homme* in the universe; although she scarcely ever in her life, except the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and the Psalms of David in metre, spent five minutes together on either prose or verse. I must except, also, from this last a certain late publication of Scots poems, which she has perused very devoutly; and all the ballads in the country, as she has (O the partial lover! you will cry) the finest "wood note wild" I ever heard. I am the more particular in this lady's character, as I know she will henceforth have the honour of a share in your best wishes.† She is still at Mauchline, as I am building my house; for this hovel that I shelter in, while occasionally here, is pervious to every blast that blows and every shower that falls; and I am only preserved from being chilled to death by being suffocated with smoke. I do not find my farm that pennyworth I was taught to expect, but I believe, in time, it may be a saving bargain. You will be pleased to hear that I have laid aside *éclat*, and bind every day after my reapers.

To save me from that horrid situation of at any time going down, in a boosing bargain of a farm, to misery, I have taken my Excise instructions, and have my commission in my pocket for any emergency of fortune. If I could set all before your view, whatever disrespect you, in common with the world, have for this business, I know you would approve of my idea.

I will make no apology, dear Madam, for this egotistic detail; I know you and your sister will be interested in every circumstance of it. What signify the silly, idle

† No letter to her by the poet after this has been preserved.

gewgaws of wealth, or the ideal trumpery of greatness! When fellow-partakers of the same nature fear the same God, have the same benevolence of heart, the same nobleness of soul, the same detestation at every thing dishonest, and the same scorn at every thing unworthy—if they are not in the dependence of absolute beggary, in the name of common sense are they not EQUALS? And if the bias, the instinctive bias of their souls run the same way, why may they not be FRIENDS?

When I may have an opportunity of sending you this, Heaven only knows. Shenstone says, “When one is confined idle within doors by bad weather, the best antidote against *ennui* is to read the letters of, or write to, one’s friends;” in that case then, if the weather continues thus, I may scrawl you half a quire.

I very lately—to wit, since harvest began—wrote a poem, not in imitation, but in the manner of Pope’s Moral Epistles. It is only a short essay, just to try the strength of my Muse’s pinion in that way. I will send you a copy of it, when once I have heard from you. I have likewise been laying the foundation of some pretty large poetic works; how the superstructure will come on, I leave to that great maker and marrer of projects—TIME. Johnson’s collection of Scots songs is going on in the third volume; and, of consequence, finds me a consumpt for a great deal of idle metre. One of the most tolerable things I have done in that way is two stanzas that I made to an air a musical gentleman of my acquaintance composed for the anniversary of his wedding-day, which happens on the 7th of November. Take it as follows:—

“The day returns—my bosom burns—
The blissful day we twa did meet,” &c.*

I give over this letter for shame. If I should be seized with a scribbling fit before this goes away, I shall make it another letter; and then you may allow your patience a week’s respite between the two. I have not room for more than the old, kind, hearty farewell!

To make some amends, *mes chères Mesdames*, for dragging you on to this second sheet; and to relieve a little the tiresomeness of my unstudied and uncorrectable prose, I shall transcribe you some of my late poetic bagatelles; though I have, these eight or ten months, done very little that way. One day, in a hermitage on the banks of the Nith, belonging to a gentleman in my neighbourhood, who is so good as give me a key at pleasure, I wrote as follows; supposing myself the sequestered, venerable inhabitant of the lonely mansion:—

“Thou whom chance may hither lead,
Be thou clad in russet weed,” &c.†

R. B.

* See vol. i. p. 143.

† See vol. i. pp. 142, 148.

No. CLXXI.

TO MR. MORISON, WRIGHT, MAUCHLINE.‡

ELLISLAND, *September 22, 1788.*

MY DEAR SIR,

NECESSITY obliges me to go into my new house even before it be plastered. I will inhabit the one end until the other is finished. About three weeks more, I think, will at farthest be my time beyond which I cannot stay in this present house. If ever you wished to deserve the blessing of him that was ready to perish; if ever you were in a situation that a little kindness would have rescued you from many evils; if ever you hope to find rest in future states of untried being—get these matters of mine ready. My servant will be out in the beginning of next week for the clock. My compliments to Mrs. Morison. I am, after all my tribulation, dear Sir, yours,

R. B.



No. CLXXII.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, Esq., OF FINTRY.

ELLISLAND, *23rd September, 1788.*

SIR,

THOUGH I am scarce able to hold up my head with this fashionable influenza, which is just now the rage hereabouts, yet with half a spark of life, I would thank you for your most generous favour of the 14th, which, owing to my infrequent calls at the post-office in the hurry of harvest, came only to hand yesternight. I assure you, my ever-honoured Sir, I read it with eyes brimful of other drops than those of anguish. Oh, what means of happiness the Author of goodness has put in their hands to whom he has given the power to bless!—and what real happiness has he given to those on whom he has likewise bestowed kind, generous, benevolent dispositions! Did you know, Sir, from how many fears and forebodings the friendly assurance of your patronage and protection has freed me, it would be some reward for your goodness.

I am cursed with a melancholy prescience, which makes me the veriest coward in life. There is not any exertion which I would not attempt, rather than be in that horrid

‡ Morison, perhaps father of Mary Morison (see LIFE), a cabinet-maker. The letter refers to some household furniture which the poet had ordered.

situation—to be ready to call on the mountains to fall on me, and the hills to cover me from the presence of a haughty landlord, or his still more haughty underling, to whom I owed—what I could not pay. My muse, too, the circumstance that, after my domestic comfort, is by far the dearest to my soul, to have it in my power to cultivate her acquaintance to advantage—in short, Sir, you have, like the great Being whose image you so richly bear, made a creature happy, who had no other claim to your goodness than his necessity, and who can make you no other return than his grateful acknowledgment.

My farm, I think I am certain, will in the long-run be an object for me; and as I rent it the first three years something under . . . , I will be able to weather by a twelvemonth, or perhaps more; though it would make me set fortune more at defiance, if it can be in your power to grant my request, as I mentioned, in the beginning of next summer. I was thinking that, as I am only a little more than five miles from Dumfries, I might perhaps officiate there, if any of these officers could be removed with more propriety than Mr. Smith; but besides the monstrous inconvenience of it to me, I could not bear to injure a poor fellow by outing him to make way for myself; to a wealthy son of good-fortune like Smith, the injury is imaginary where the propriety of your rules admits.

Had I been well, I intended to have troubled you further with a description of my soil and plan of farming; but business will call me to town about February next. I hope then to have the honour of assuring you *in propria persona*, how much and how truly I am, Sir, your deeply indebted and ever-grateful, humble servant,

R. B.



No. CLXXIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP,
MOREHAM MAINS, HADDINGTON.

MAUCHLINE, 27th September, 1788.

I HAVE received twins, dear Madam, more than once; but scarcely ever with more pleasure than when I received yours of the 12th instant. To make myself understood; I had wrote to Mr. Graham, inclosing my poem addressed to him, and the same post which favoured me with yours brought me an answer from him. It was dated the very day he had received mine: and I am quite at a loss to say whether it was more polite or kind.

Your criticisms, my honoured benefactress, are truly the work of a friend. They are not the blasting depre-

dations of a canker-toothed, caterpillar critic, nor are they the fair statement of cold impartiality, balancing with unfeeling exactitude the *pro* and *con* of an author's merits; they are the judicious observations of animated friendship, selecting the beauties of the piece. I have just arrived from Nithsdale, and will be here a fortnight. I was on horseback this morning by three o'clock; for between my wife and my farm is just forty-six miles. As I jogged on in the dark, I was taken with a poetic fit, as follows:—

MRS. FERGUSON OF CRAIGBARROCH'S LAMENTATION FOR
THE DEATH OF HER SON; AN UNCOMMONLY PROMISING
YOUTH OF EIGHTEEN OR NINETEEN YEARS OF AGE

"Fate gave the word—the arrow sped,
And pierced my darling's heart," &c.*

You will not send me your poetic rambles, but, you see, I am no niggard of mine. I am sure your impromptus give me double pleasure; what falls from your pen can be neither unentertaining in itself, nor indifferent to me.

The one fault you found is just; but I cannot please myself in an emendation.

What a life of solicitude is the life of a parent! You interested me much in your young couple. I suppose it is not any of the ladies I have seen.

I would not take my folio paper for this epistle, and now I repent it. I am so jaded with my dirty long journey that I was afraid to drawl into the essence of dulness with anything larger than a quarto, and so I must leave out another rhyme of this morning's manufacture.

I will pay the sapientipotent George most cheerfully, to hear from you ere I leave Ayrshire.

I have the honour to be, dear Madam, your much obliged, and most respectful, humble servant,

R. B.



No. CLXXIV

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER.

MAUCHLINE, 1st October, 1788.

I HAVE been here in this country about three days, and all that time my chief reading has been the "Address to Lochlomond" you were so obliging as to send to me.† Were I impanelled one of the author's jury, to determine his criminality respecting the sin of poesy, my verdict should be "Guilty! A poet of nature's making!" It is an excellent method of improvement, and what I believe every poet does, to place some favourite classic

* See vol. i. p. 146.

† A poem written by one of the masters of the High School. Edinburgh, afterwards Dr. Crichton, minister of Dalton, Dumfriesshire.

author in his own walks of study and composition before him as a model. Though your author had not mentioned the name, I could have, at half a glance, guessed his model to be Thomson. Will my brother-poet forgive me, if I venture to hint that his imitation of that immortal bard is in two or three places rather more servile than such a genius as his required :—*c. g.*,

“To soothe the maddening passions all to peace.”—ADDRESS.

“To soothe the throbbing passions into peace.”—THOMSON.

I think the “Address” is in simplicity, harmony, and elegance of versification, fully equal to the “Seasons.” Like Thomson, too, he has looked into nature for himself: you meet with no copied description. One particular criticism I made at first reading; in no one instance has he said too much. He never flags in his progress, but, like a true poet of nature’s making, kindles in his course. His beginning is simple and modest, as if distrustful of the strength of his pinion; only, I do not altogether like—

“Truth,

The soul of every song that’s nobly great.”

Fiction is the soul of many a song that is nobly great. Perhaps I am wrong: this may be but a prose criticism. Is not the phrase, in line 7, page 6, “Great lake,” too much vulgarized by every-day language for so sublime a poem?

“Great mass of waters, theme for nobler song,”

is perhaps no emendation. His enumeration of a comparison with other lakes is at once harmonious and poetic. Every reader’s ideas must sweep the

“Winding margin of an hundred miles.”

The perspective that follows mountains blue—the imprisoned billows beating in vain—the wooded isles—the digressions on the yew-tree—“Benlomond’s lofty, cloud-envelop’d head,” &c., are beautiful. A thunder-storm is a subject which has been often tried, yet our poet in his grand picture has interjected a circumstance, so far as I know, entirely original :—

“The gloom

Deep seam’d with frequent streaks of moving fire.”

In his preface to the Storm, “the glens how dark between,” is noble highland landscape! The “rain ploughing the red mould,” too, is beautifully fancied. “Benlomond’s lofty, pathless top,” is a good expression; and the surrounding view from it is truly great: the

“silver mist,

Beneath the beaming sun,”

is well described; and here he has contrived to enliven his poem with a little of that passion which bids fair, I think, to usurp the modern Muses altogether. I know

not how far this episode is a beauty upon the whole, but the swain’s wish to carry “some faint idea of the vision bright,” to entertain her “partial listening ear,” is a pretty thought. But, in my opinion, the most beautiful passages in the whole poem are the fowls crowding, in wintry frosts, to Lochlomond’s “hospitable flood;” their wheeling round, their lighting, mixing, diving, &c.; and the glorious description of the sportsman. This last is equal to any thing in the “Seasons.” The idea of “the floating tribes far distant seen, all glistening to the moon,” provoking his eye as he is obliged to leave them, is a noble ray of poetic genius. “The howling winds,” the “hideous roar” of “the white cascades,” are all in the same style.

I forget that while I am thus holding forth with the heedless warmth of an enthusiast, I am perhaps tiring you with nonsense. I must, however, mention that the last verse of the sixteenth page is one of the most elegant compliments I have ever seen. I must likewise notice that beautiful paragraph beginning “The gleaming lake,” &c. I dare not go into the particular beauties of the last two paragraphs, but they are admirably fine, and truly Ossianic.

I must beg your pardon for this lengthened scrawl. I had no idea of it when I began. I should like to know who the author is; but, whoever he be, please present him with my grateful thanks for the entertainment he has afforded me.

A friend of mine desired me to commission for him two books, “Letters on the Religion essential to Man,” a book you sent me before; and “The World Unmasked, or the Philosopher the greatest Cheat.” Send me them by the first opportunity. The Bible you sent me is truly elegant; I only wish it had been in two volumes.

R. B.



No. CLXXV.

TO THE EDITOR OF “THE STAR.”*

November 8, 1788.

SIR,

NOTWITHSTANDING the opprobrious epithets with which some of our philosophers and gloomy sectarians have branded our nature—the principle of universal selfishness, the proneness to all evil, they have given us; still, the detestation in which inhumanity to the distressed and insolence to the fallen are held by all mankind, shows that they are not natives of the human heart. Even the unhappy partner of our kind who is undone, the

* One of the editors of the *Star* at this time was John Mayne, author of “The Siller Gun.” See LIFE.

bitter consequence of his follies or his crimes, who but sympathizes with the miseries of this ruined prodigal brother? We forget the injuries, and feel for the man.

I went, last Wednesday, to my parish church, most cordially to join in grateful acknowledgment to the AUTHOR OF ALL GOOD, for the consequent blessings of the glorious Revolution.* To that auspicious event we owe no less than our liberties, civil and religious: to it we are likewise indebted for the present Royal Family; the ruling features of whose administration have ever been mildness to the subject, and tenderness of his rights.

Bred and educated in Revolution principles, the principles of reason and common sense, it could not be any silly political prejudice which made my heart revolt at the harsh, abusive manner in which the reverend gentleman mentioned the House of Stuart, and which, I am afraid, was too much the language of the day. We may rejoice sufficiently in our deliverance from past evils, without cruelly raking up the ashes of those whose misfortune it was, perhaps as much as their crime, to be the authors of those evils; and we may bless God for all his goodness to us as a nation, without, at the same time, cursing a few ruined, powerless exiles, who only harboured ideas, and made attempts, that most of us would have done, had we been in their situation.

"The bloody and tyrannical House of Stuart" may be said with propriety and justice, when compared with the present royal family, and the sentiments of our days; but is there no allowance to be made for the manners of the times? Were the royal contemporaries of the Stuarts more attentive to their subjects' rights? Might not the epithets of "bloody and tyrannical" be, with at least equal justice, applied to the House of Tudor, of York, or any other of their predecessors?

The simple state of the case, Sir, seems to be this:—At that period, the science of government, the knowledge of the true relation between king and subject, was, like other sciences and other knowledge, just in its infancy, emerging from dark ages of ignorance and barbarity.

The Stuarts only contended for prerogatives which they knew their predecessors enjoyed, and which they saw their contemporaries enjoying; but these prerogatives were inimical to the happiness of a nation and the rights of subjects.

In this contest between prince and people, the consequence of that light of science which had lately dawned over Europe, the monarch of France, for example, was victorious over the struggling liberties of his people: with us, luckily, the monarch failed, and his unwarrantable pretensions fell a sacrifice to our rights and happiness. Whether it was owing to the wisdom of leading individuals, or to the jostling of parties, I cannot pretend to deter-

mine; but, likewise happily for us, the kingly power was shifted into another branch of the family, who, as they owed the throne solely to the call of a free people, could claim nothing inconsistent with the covenanted terms which placed them there.

The Stuarts have been condemned and laughed at for the folly and impracticability of their attempts in 1715 and 1745. That they failed, I bless God; but cannot join in the ridicule against them. Who does not know that the abilities or defects of leaders and commanders are often hidden until put to the touchstone of exigency; and that there is a caprice of fortune, an omnipotence in particular accidents and conjunctures of circumstances, which exalt us as heroes or brand us as madmen, just as they are for or against us?

Man, Mr. Publisher, is a strange, weak, inconsistent being: who would believe, Sir, that in this our Augustan age of liberality and refinement—while we seem so justly sensible and jealous of our rights and liberties, and animated with such indignation against the very memory of those who would have subverted them—that a certain people under our national protection should complain, not against our monarch and a few favourite advisers, but against our WHOLE LEGISLATIVE BODY, for similar oppression, and almost in the very same terms, as our forefathers did of the House of Stuart? I will not, I cannot, enter into the merits of the cause; but I dare say the American Congress, of 1776, will be allowed to have been as able and enlightened as the English Convention was in 1688; and that their posterity will celebrate the centenary of their deliverance from us, as duly and sincerely as we do ours from the oppressive measures of the wrong-headed House of Stuart.

To conclude, Sir; let every man who has a tear for the many miseries incident to humanity, feel for a family illustrious as any in Europe, and unfortunate beyond historic precedent; and let every Briton (and particularly every Scotsman), who ever looked with reverential pity on the dotage of a parent, cast a veil over the fatal mistakes of the kings of his forefathers.

R. B.



No. CLXXVI.

TO MRS. DUNLOP, OF DUNLOP,

CARE OF WM. KERR, ESQ., POST OFFICE, EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, 13th November, 1788.

MADAM,

I HAD the very great pleasure of dining at Dunlop yesterday. Men are said to flatter women because they are weak; if it is so, poets must be weaker

* This was a sermon preached on the Assembly's Thanksgiving Day, November 5, 1788, by the Rev. Mr. Kilpatrick, to celebrate the accession of King William to the throne.

still; for Misses Rachel and Keith, and Miss Georgina M'Kay, with their flattering attentions and artful compliments, absolutely turned my head. I own they did not lard me over as a poet does his patron, or still more his patroness, nor did they sugar me up as a Cameronian preacher does J—s—s C—st; but they so intoxicated me with their sly insinuations and delicate innuendos of compliment, that, if it had not been for a lucky recollection, how much additional weight and lustre your good opinion and friendship must give me in that circle, I had certainly looked on myself as a person of no small consequence. I dare not say one word how much I was charmed with the Major's friendly welcome, elegant manner, and acute remark, lest I should be thought to balance my orientalisms of applause over against the finest quoy* in Ayrshire, which he made me a present of to help and adorn my farm-stock. As it was on Hallow-day, I am determined, annually as that day returns, to decorate her horns with an ode of gratitude to the family of Dunlop.

The songs in the second volume of the Museum, marked D. are Dr. Blacklock's; but, as I am sorry to say, they are far short of his other works. I, who only know the cyphers of them all, shall never let it be known. Those marked T. are the work of an obscure, tippling, but extraordinary body of the name of Tytler; a mortal who, though he drudges about Edinburgh as a common printer, with leaky shoes, a sky-lighted hat, and knee-buckles as unlike as George-by-the-grace-of-God and Solomon-the-son-of-David; yet that same unknown, drunken mortal is author and compiler of three-fourth's of Elliot's pompous *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Those marked Z. I have given to the world as old verses to their respective tunes; but in fact, of a good many of them, little more than the Chorus is ancient; though there is no reason for telling every body this piece of intelligence. Next letter I write you, I shall send one or two sets of verses I intend for Johnson's third volume.

What you mention of the Thanksgiving day is inspiration from above. Is it not remarkable, odiously remarkable, that though manners are more civilized, and the rights of mankind better understood, by an Augustan Century's improvement, yet in this very reign of heavenly Hanoverianism, and almost in this very year, an empire beyond the Atlantic has its REVOLUTION too, and for the very same maladministration and legislative misdeemeanours in the illustrious and sapientipotent Family of H—— as was complained of in the "tyrannical and bloody house of Stuart?"

So soon as I know of your arrival at Dunlop, I shall take the first conveniency to dedicate a day, or perhaps two, to you and friendship, under the guarantee of the

Major's hospitality. There will soon be threescore and ten miles of permanent distance between us; and now that your friendship and friendly correspondence is entwisted with the heart-strings of my enjoyment of life I must indulge myself in a festive day of "The feast of reason and the flow of soul." I have the honour to be, Madam, your grateful humble servant,

R. B.



No. CLXXVII.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, ENGRAVER.

MAUCHLINE, *November 15, 1788.*

MY DEAR SIR,

I HAVE sent you two more songs. If you have got any tunes, or anything to correct, please send them by return of the carrier.

I can easily see, my dear friend, that you will very probably have four volumes. Perhaps you may not find your account lucratively in this business; but you are a patriot for the music of your country; and I am certain posterity will look on themselves as highly indebted to your public spirit. Be not in a hurry; let us go on correctly, and your name shall be immortal.

I am preparing a flaming preface for your third volume. I see every day new musical publications advertised; but what are they? Gaudy, hunted butterflies of a day, and then vanish for ever: but your work will outlive the momentary neglects of idle fashion, and defy the teeth of time.

Have you never a fair goddess that leads you a wild-goose chase of amorous devotion? Let me know a few of her qualities, such as whether she be rather black, or fair; plump, or thin; short, or tall, &c.; and choose your air, and I shall task my muse to celebrate her.

R. B.



No. CLXXVIII.

TO DR. BLACKLOCK, EDINBURGH.

MAUCHLINE, *November 15, 1788.*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

AS I hear nothing of your motions, but that you are, or were, out of town, I do not know where this may find you, or whether it will find you at all. I wrote you a long letter, dated from the land of Matrimony, in June; but either it had not found you, or, what I dread more, it found you and Mrs. Blacklock in too

* Heifer.

precarious a state of health and spirits to take notice of an idle packet.

I have done many little things for Johnson, since I had the pleasure of seeing you; and I have finished one piece, in the way of Pope's "Moral Epistles;" but, from your silence, I have every thing to fear, so I have only sent you two melancholy things,* and I tremble lest they should too well suit the tone of your present feelings.

In a fortnight I move, bag and baggage, to Nithsdale; till then, my direction is at this place; after that period it will be at Ellisland, near Dumfries. It would extremely oblige me, were it but half a line, to let me know how you are, and where you are. Can I be indifferent to the fate of a man to whom I owe so much? A man whom I not only esteem, but venerate.

My warmest good wishes and most respectful compliments to Mrs. Blacklock, and Miss Johnson, if she is with you.

I cannot conclude without telling you that I am more and more pleased with the step I took respecting "my Jean." Two things, from my happy experience, I set down as apophthegms in life. A wife's head is immaterial, compared with her heart; and—"Virtue's (for wisdom, what poet pretends to it!) ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Adieu!

R. B.



No. CLXXIX.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, Esq., DRUMLANRIG.

ENCLOSING A SONG.†

SANQUHAR, 26th November, 1788.

SIR,

I WRITE you this and the enclosed, literally *en passant*, for I am just baiting on my way to Ayrshire. I have philosophy or pride enough to support me with unwounded indifference against the neglect of my more dull superiors, the merely rank and file of noblesse and gentry may, even to keep my vanity quite sober under the larding of their compliments; but from those who are equally distinguished by their rank and character—those who bear the true elegant impressions of the Great Creator on the richest materials—their little notices and attentions are to me among the first of earthly enjoyments. The honour thou didst my fugitive pieces in requesting copies of them is so highly flattering to my feelings and poetic ambition, that I could not resist even this half

* The songs are "A mother's lament for the loss of her son" (see vol. i. p. 146), and the song beginning "The lazy mist hangs from the brow of the hill" (see vol. i. p. 147).

† "O were I on Parnassus hill."—See vol. i. p. 142.

opportunity of scrawling off for you the enclosed, as a small but honest testimony how truly and gratefully I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply obliged humble servant,

R. B.



No. CLXXX.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 17th December, 1788.

MY DEAR HONOURED FRIEND,

YOURS, dated Edinburgh, which I have just read, makes me very unhappy. "Almost blind and wholly deaf," are melancholy news of human nature: but when told of a much-loved and honoured friend, they carry misery in the sound. Goodness on your part, and gratitude on mine, began a tie which has gradually entwisted itself among the dearest chords of my bosom, and I tremble at the omens of your late and present ailing habit and shattered health. You miscalculate matters widely, when you forbid my waiting on you, lest it should hurt my worldly concerns. My small scale of farming is exceedingly more simple and easy, than what you have lately seen at Moreham Mains. But, be that as it may, the heart of the man and the fancy of the poet are the two grand considerations for which I live: if miry ridges and dirty dunghills are to engross the best part of the functions of my soul immortal, I had better been a rook or a magpie at once, and then I should not have been plagued with any ideas superior to breaking of clods and picking up grubs; not to mention barn-door cocks or mallards, creatures with which I could almost exchange lives at any time. If you continue so deaf, I am afraid a visit will be no great pleasure to either of us; but if I hear you are got so well again as to be able to relish conversation, look you to it, Madam, for I will make my threatening good. I am to be at the New-year-day fair of Ayr; and, by all that is sacred in the world, friend, I will come and see you. . . .

Your meeting, which you so well describe, with your old schoolfellow and friend, was truly interesting. Out upon the ways of the world! They spoil these "social offspring of the heart." Two veterans of the "men of the world" would have met with little more heart-workings than two old hacks worn out on the road. Apropos, is not the Scotch phrase, "Auld lang syne," exceedingly expressive? There is an old song and tune which has often thrilled through my soul. You know I am an enthusiast in old Scotch songs. I shall give you the

verses on the other sheet, as I suppose Mr. Kerr* will save you this postage.

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?" &c.†

Light be the turf on the breast of the Heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment! There is more of the fire of native genius in it than in half-a-dozen of modern English Bacchanalians! Now I am on my hobby-horse, I cannot help inserting two other old stanzas, which please me mightily:—

"Go fetch to me a pint o' wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie," &c.‡



No. CLXXXI.

TO MR. WILLIAM CRUIKSHANK, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 1788.

I HAVE not room, my dear friend, to answer all the particulars of your last kind letter. I shall be in Edinburgh on some business very soon; and as I shall be two days, or perhaps three, in town, we shall discuss matters *vis à voce*. My knee, I believe, will never be entirely well: and an unlucky fall this winter has made it still worse. I well remember the circumstance you allude to, respecting Creach's opinion of Mr. Nicol; but, as the first gentleman owes me still about fifty pounds, I dare not meddle in the affair.

It gave me a very heavy heart to read such accounts of the consequences of your quarrel with that puritanic, rotten-hearted, hell-commissioned scoundrel, Adam. If, notwithstanding your unprecedented industry in public, and your irreproachable conduct in private life, he still has you so much in his power, what ruin may he not bring on some others I could name?

Many and happy returns of seasons to you, with your dearest and worthiest friend, and the lovely little pledge of your happy union. May the great Author of life, and of every enjoyment that can render life delightful, make her that comfortable blessing to you both, which you so ardently wish for, and which, allow me to say, you so well deserve! Glance over the foregoing verses,§ and let me have your blots.

R. B.

* Mr. Kerr was postmaster in Edinburgh.

† See vol. ii. p. 58.

‡ See vol. i. p. 150.

§ Lines written in Friar's Carse Hermitage.

No. CLXXXII.

TO MR. JOHN TENNANT, AUCHENBEY.

CARE OF MR. JOHN ROBB, INNKEEPER, AYR.

December 22, 1788.

MY DEAR SIR,

I YESTERDAY tried my cask of whisky for the first time, and I assure you it does you great credit. It will bear five waters, strong, or six, ordinary toddy. The whisky of this country is a most rascally liquor; and, by consequence, only drunk by the most rascally part of the inhabitants. I am persuaded, if you once get a footing here, you might do a great deal of business, in the way of consumpt: and should you commence Distiller again, this is the native barley country. I am ignorant if, in your present way of dealing, you would think it worth while to extend your business so far as this country side. I write you this on the account of an accident, which I must take the merit of having partly designed too. A neighbour of mine, a John Currie, miller in Carse-mill—a man who is, in a word, a good man, a "very" good man, even for a £500 bargain—he and his wife were in my house the time I broke open the cask. They keep a country public-house and sell a great deal of foreign spirits, but all along thought that whisky would have degraded their house. They were perfectly astonished at my whisky, both for its taste and strength; and, by their desire, I write you to know if you could supply them with liquor of an equal quality, and at what price. Please write me by first post, and direct to me at Ellisland, near Dumfries. If you could take a jaunt this way yourself, I have a spare spoon, knife, and fork very much at your service. My compliments to Mrs. Tennant, and all the good folks in Glenconner and Barquharrie. I am, most truly, my dear Sir, yours,

R. B.



No. CLXXXIII.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, *New-year-day Morning*, 1789.

THIS, dear Madam, is a morning of wishes; and would to God that I came under the Apostle James's description! "The effectual, fervent prayer of a *righteous man* availeth much." In that case, Madam, you should "welcome in" a year full of blessings: everything that obstructs

or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment should be removed, and every pleasure that frail Humanity can taste should be yours. I own myself so little a Presbyterian that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of Devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought, which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

This day; the first Sunday of May; a breezy, blue-skied noon, some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of Autumn; these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holidays. Not like the sacramental, executioner-face of a Kilmarnock communion; but to laugh or cry, be cheerful or pensive, moral or devout, according to the mood and tense of the season and myself. I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the Spectator, "The Vision of Mirza;" a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables: "On the fifth day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my forefathers, I always *keep holy*; after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer," &c.*

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them; that one should be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in Spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the foxglove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birk, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey-plover in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, that, like the *Æolian harp*, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to these proofs of those awful and important realities—a God that made all things—man's immaterial and immortal nature—and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave—these proofs that we deduct by dint of our own powers of observation. However respectable individuals in all ages have been, I have ever looked on Mankind in the lump to be nothing better than a foolish, headstrong, credulous, unthinking mob; and their universal belief has ever had extremely little weight with me. Still I am a

very sincere believer in the Bible; but I am drawn by the conviction of a man, not by the halter of an ass.

Apropos to an ass, how do you like the following Apostrophe to Dulness, which I intend to interweave in "The Poet's Progress?"

"O Dulness, portion of the truly blest!
Calm, shelter'd haven of eternal rest!" &c.†

I have sketched two or three verses to you; but as a private opportunity offers immediately, I must defer transcribing them. A servant of mine goes to Ayrshire with this, but I shall write you by post. If I am to be so happy as to have it in my power to see you when I go to Ayr Fair, which I very much doubt, I will try to dine at Dunlop in the Wednesday of that week.

If it is good weather in the Fair-week, I shall try my utmost; for if I hit my aim aright, it will not be in my power in any given time again: Farewell!

R. B.



No. CLXXXIV.

TO DR. MOORE, LONDON.

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES,
4th January, 1789.

SIR,

As often as I think of writing to you, which has been three or four times every week these six months, it gives me something so like the idea of an ordinary-sized statue offering at a conversation with the Rhodian Colossus, that my mind misgives me, and the affair always miscarries somewhere between purpose and resolve. I have, at last, got some business with you, and business-letters are written by the style-book. I say my business is with you, Sir, for you never had any with me, except the business that benevolence has in the mansion of poverty.

The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late *éclat* was owing to the singularity of my situation, and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I said in the preface of my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but the knack, the aptitude to learn the muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him "who forms the secret bias of the soul;" but I as firmly believe, that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labour, attention, and pains. At least I am resolved to try my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the press I put

* The exquisite paper referred to is by Addison.

† See vol. i. p. 115.

off to a very distant day, a day that may never arrive—but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour. Nature has given very few, if any, of the profession, the talents of shining in every species of composition. I shall try (for until trial it is impossible to know) whether she has qualified me to shine in any one. The worst of it is, by the time one has finished a piece, it has been so often viewed and reviewed before the mental eye, that one loses, in a good measure, the powers of critical discrimination. Here the best criterion I know is a friend—not only of abilities to judge, but with good nature enough, like a prudent teacher with a young learner, to praise perhaps a little more than is exactly just, lest the thin-skinned animal fall into that most deplorable of all poetic diseases—heart-breaking despondency of himself. Dare I, Sir, already immensely indebted to your goodness, ask the additional obligation of your being that friend to me? I enclose you an essay of mine, in a walk of poesy to me entirely new; I mean the epistle* addressed to R. G., Esq., or Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq., a gentleman of uncommon worth, to whom I lie under very great obligations. The story of the poem, like most of my poems, is connected with my own story, and to give you the one, I must give you something of the other. I cannot boast of Mr. Creech's ingenuous, fair dealing to me. He kept me hanging about Edinburgh, from 7th August, 1787, until the 13th April, 1788, before he would condescend to give me a statement of affairs; nor had I got it even then, but for an angry letter I wrote him, which irritated his pride. I could—not “a tale”—but a detail “unfold;” but what am I that I should speak against the Lord's anointed Bailie of Edinburgh?

I believe I shall, in whole (£100 copy-right included), clear about £400, some little odds; and even part of this depends upon what the gentleman has yet to settle with me. I give you this information, because you did me the honour to interest yourself much in my welfare. I give you this information, but I give it to yourself only; for I am still much in the gentleman's mercy. Perhaps I injure the man in the idea I am sometimes tempted to have of him; God forbid I should! A little time will try, for in a month I shall go to town to wind up the business, if possible.

To give the rest of my story in brief: I have married “my Jean,” and taken a farm. With the first step, I have every day more and more reason to be satisfied; with the last it is rather the reverse. I have a younger brother who supports my aged mother; another still younger brother, and three sisters in a farm. On my last return from Edinburgh, it cost me about £180 to save them from ruin. Not that I have lost so much; I only interposed between my brother and his impending

fate by the loan of so much. I give myself no airs on this, for it was mere selfishness on my part: I was conscious that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety and fraternal affection into the scale in my favour might help to smooth matters at the “grand reckoning.” There is still one thing would make my circumstances quite easy; I have an Excise officer's commission, and I live in the midst of a country division. My request to Mr. Graham, who is one of the Commissioners of Excise, was, if in his power, to procure me that division. If I were very sanguine, I might hope that some of my great patrons might procure me a Treasury warrant for supervisor, surveyor-general, &c. . . .

Thus secure of a livelihood “to thee, sweet Poetry, delightful maid,” I would consecrate my future days.

R. B.



No. CLXXXV.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, *January 6, 1789.*

MANY happy returns of the season to you, my dear Sir! May you be comparatively happy up to your comparative worth among the sons of men; which wish would, I am sure, make you one of the most blest of the human race.

I do not know if passing a “Writer to the signet” be a trial of scientific merit, or a mere business of friends and interest. However it be, let me quote you my two favourite passages, which, though I have repeated them ten thousand times, still they rouse my manhood and steel my resolution like inspiration.

“On Reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man.”—YOUNG.

“Hear, Alfred, hero of the state,
Thy genius heaven's high will declare;
The triumph of the truly great
Is never, never to despair!
Is never to despair!”—MASQUE OF ALFRED.

I grant, you enter the lists of life to struggle for bread, business, notice, and distinction, in common with hundreds. But who are they? Men, like yourself, and of that aggregate body, your compeers, seven-tenths of them come short of your advantages, natural and accidental; while two of those that remain either neglect their parts, as flowers blooming in a desert, or mis-spend their strength, like a bull goring a bramble bush.

But, to change the theme; I am still catering for

* See vol. i. p. 145.

Johnson's publication, and among others, I have brushed up the following old favourite song a little, with a view to your worship. I have only altered a word here and there; but if you like the humour of it, we shall think of a stanza or two to add to it:—

"Robin shure in hairst, I shure wi' him;
Fient a heuk had I, yet I stack by him," &c.*

R. B.



CLXXXVI.

TO JOHN M'MURDO, Esq., DRUMLANRIG.

ELLISLAND, 9th January, 1789.

SIR,

A POET and a beggar are in so many points of view alike, that one might take them for the same individual under different designations; were it not that, though with a trifling poetie licence, poets may be styled beggars, yet the converse of the proposition does not hold, that every beggar is a poet. In one particular, however, they remarkably agree: if you help either the one or the other to a mug of ale or the picking of a bone, they will willingly repay you with a song. This occurs to me at present, as I have just despatched a rib of J. Kilpatrick's Highlander,† a bargain for which I am indebted to you (in the style of our ballad-printers), "Five Excellent New Songs."

The enclosed is nearly my newest song, and one that has cost me some pains, though that is but an equivocal mark of its excellence. Two or three others which I have by me shall do themselves the honour to wait on your after leisure; petitioners for admittance into favour must not harass the condescension of their benefactor.

You see, Sir, what it is to patronize a poet. 'Tis like being a magistrate in Petty-borough; you do them the favour to preside in their council for one year, and your name bears the prefatory stigma of "Baillie" for life.

With, not the compliments, but the best wishes, the sincerest prayer of the season for you, that you may see many happy years with Mrs. M'Murdo and your family—two blessings, by the by, to which your rank does not entitle you, a loving wife and fine family being almost the only good things of this life to which the farm-house and cottage have an exclusive right—I have the honour to be, Sir, your much indebted and very humble servant,

R. B.

No. CLXXXVII.

TO PROFESSOR DUGALD STEWART.

SIR,

ELLISLAND, 20th January, 1798.

THE enclosed sealed packet I sent to Edinburgh a few days after I had the happiness of meeting you in Ayrshire, but you were gone for the Continent. I have added a few more of my productions, those for which I am indebted to the Nithsdale Muses. The piece inscribed to R. G., Esq., is a copy of verses I sent Mr. Graham, of Fintry, accompanying a request for his assistance in a matter, to me, of very great moment. To that gentleman I am already doubly indebted, for deeds of kindness of serious import to my dearest interests, done in a manner grateful to the delicate feelings of sensibility. This poem is a species of composition new to me; but I do not intend it shall be my last essay of the kind, as you will see by the "Poet's Progress."‡ These fragments, if my design succeeds, are but a small part of the intended whole. I propose it shall be the work of my utmost exertions ripened by years: of course I do not wish it much known. The fragment, beginning "A little, upright, pert, tart," &c.,§ I have not shewn to man living, till now I send it you. It is the postulata, the axioms, the definition of a character, which, if it appear at all, shall be placed in a variety of lights. This particular part I send you merely as a sample of my hand at portrait-sketching; but lest idle conjecture should pretend to point out the original, please, let it be for your single, sole inspection.

Need I make any apology for this trouble to a gentleman who has treated me with such marked benevolence and peculiar kindness; who has entered into my interests with so much zeal, and on whose critical decisions I can so fully depend? A poet as I am by trade, these decisions are to me of the last consequence. My late transient acquaintance among some of the mere rank and file of greatness I resign with ease: but to the distinguished champions of genius and learning, I shall be ever ambitious of being known. The native genius and accurate discernment in Mr. Stewart's critical strictures, the justice (the iron justice, for he has no bowels of compassion for a poor poetie sinner) of Dr. Gregory's remarks, and the delicacy of Professor Dalzell's taste, I shall ever revere.

I shall be in Edinburgh some time next month. I have the honour to be, Sir, your highly obliged and very humble servant,

R. B.

* See vol. ii. p. 19.

† Kilpatrick was a blacksmith. Burns alludes to a wedder which he had got through M'Murdo from Kilpatrick.

‡ See vol. i. p. 114.

§ See vol. i. p. 115.

No. CLXXXVIII.

TO THE HON. HENRY ERSKINE.*

ELLISLAND, 22nd January, 1789.

SIR,

THERE are two things which, I believe, the blow that terminates my existence alone can destroy—my attachment and propensity to poesy, and my sense of what I owe to your goodness. There is nothing in the different situations of a Great and a Little man that vexes me more than the ease with which the one practises some virtues that to the other are extremely difficult, or perhaps wholly impracticable. A man of consequence and fashion shall richly repay a deed of kindness with a nod and a smile, or a hearty shake of the hand; while a poor fellow labours under a sense of gratitude, which, like copper coin, though it loads the bearer, is yet of small account in the currency and commerce of the world. As I have the honour, Sir, to stand in the poor fellow's predicament with respect to you, will you accept of a device I have thought on to acknowledge these obligations I can never cancel? Mankind, in general, agree in testifying their devotion, their gratitude, their friendship, or their love, by presenting whatever they hold dearest. Everybody who is in the least acquainted with the character of a poet, knows that there is nothing in the world on which he sets so much value as his verses. I desire, from time to time, as she may bestow her favours, to present you with the productions of my humble Muse. The enclosed are the principal of her works on the banks of the Nith. The poem inscribed to R. G., Esq., is some verses, accompanying a request, which I sent to Mr. Graham of Fintry—a gentleman who has given double value to some important favours he has bestowed on me by his manner of doing them, and on whose future patronage, likewise, I must depend for matters to me of the last consequence.

I have no great faith in the boastful pretensions to intuitive propriety and unlaboured elegance. The rough material of Fine Writing is certainly the gift of Genius; but I as firmly believe that the workmanship is the united effort of pains, attention, and repeated trial. The piece addressed to Mr. Graham is my first essay in that didactic, epistolary way; which circumstance, I hope, will bespeak your indulgence. To your friend Captain Erskine's strictures† I lay claim as a relation; not, indeed, that I have the honour to be akin to the peerage, but because he is a son of Parnassus.

I intend being in Edinburgh in four or five weeks, when I shall certainly do myself the honour of waiting on you, to testify with what respect and gratitude, &c.

R. B.

* Supposed to have been written to the above.

† Captain Andrew Erskine, a poet and musical amateur residing in Edinburgh, brother to the Earl of Kelly.

No. CLXXXIX.

TO MR. DAVID BLAIR,

GUN MAKER, ST. PAUL'S SQUARE, BIRMINGHAM.

ELLISLAND, 23rd January, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

MY honour has lain bleeding these two months almost, as 'tis near that time since I received your kind though short epistle of the 29th October. The defensive tools do more than half mankind do, they do honour to their maker; but I trust that with me they shall have the fate of a miser's gold—to be often admired, but never used.

Long before your letter came to hand, I sent you, by way of Mr. Nicol, a copy of the book, and a proof-copy of the print, loose among the leaves of the book. These, I hope, are safe in your possession some time ago. If I could think of any other channel of communication with you than the villanous expensive one of the Post, I could send you a parcel of my Rhymes; partly as a small return for your kind, handsome compliment, and much more as a mark of my sincere esteem and respect for Mr. Blair. A piece I did lately I shall try to cram into this letter, as I think the turn of thought may perhaps please you.

"Thou whom chance may hither lead,
Be thou clad in russet weed," &c.‡

I remember with pleasure, my dear Sir, a visit you talked of paying to Dumfries, in Spring or Summer. I shall only say I have never parted with a man, after so little acquaintance, whom I more ardently wished to see again. At your first convenience, a line to inform me of an affair in which I am much interested—just an answer to the question, How you do? will highly oblige, my dear Sir, yours very sincerely.

R. B.



No. CXC.

TO ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM, Esq.,
WRITER, EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 24th January, 1789.

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM,

WHEN I saw in my last newspaper that a Surgeon in Edinburgh was married to a certain amiable and accomplished young lady, whose name begins with Ann—a lady with whom I fancy I have the honour of

‡ See vol. i. pp. 142, 148.

being a little acquainted*—I sincerely felt for a much esteemed friend of mine. As you are the single, only instance that ever came within the sphere of my observation of human nature, of a young fellow, dissipated but not debauched, a circumstance that has ever given me the highest idea of the native qualities of your heart, I am certain that a disappointment in the tender passion must, to you, be a very serious matter. To the hopeful youth, keen on the badger foot of Mammon, or listed under the gaudy banners of ambition, a love-disappointment, as such, is an easy business; nay, perhaps he hugs himself on his escape; but to your scanty tribe of mankind, whose souls bear, on the richest materials, the most elegant impress of the Great Creator, Love enters deeply into their existence, and is entwined with their very thread of life. I can myself affirm, both from bachelor and wedlock experience, that Love is the Alpha and Omega of human enjoyment. All the pleasures, all the happiness of my humble compeers, flow immediately and directly from this delicious source. It is the spark of celestial fire which lights up the wintry hut of poverty, and makes the cheerless mansion warm, comfortable, and gay. It is the emanation of Divinity that preserves the sons and daughters of rustic labour from degenerating into the brutes with which they daily hold converse. Without it, life to the poor inmates of the cottage would be a damning gift.

I intended to go on with some kind of consolatory epistle, when, unawares, I flew off in this rhapsodical tangent. Instead of attempting to resume a subject for which I am so ill-qualified, I shall ask your opinion of some verses I have lately begun on a theme of which you are the best judge I ever saw. It is Love too; though not just warranted by the law of nations. A married lady of my acquaintance, whose *crim. con.* amour with a certain Captain made some noise in the world, is supposed to write to him, now in the West Indies, as follows:—

By all I lov'd, neglected and forgot,
No friendly face e'er lights my squalid cot;
Shunn'd, hated, wrong'd, unpitied, unredrest,
The mock'd quotation of the scorner's jest!

In vain would Prudence, with decorous sneer,
Point out a censuring world, and bid me fear;
Above the world, on wings of Love, I rise—
I know its worst, and can that worst despise:
Let Prudence' direst bodements on me fall,
M—————y, rich reward, o'erpays them all!

* Married at Edinburgh, Mr. Forrest Dewar, Surgeon, to Miss Anne Stewart, daughter of John Stewart, Esq., of East Craigs, January 13, 1789.

Mild zephyrs waft thee to life's farthest shore,
Nor think of me and my distresses more:
Falsehood accurst! No! still I beg a place,
Still near thy heart some little, little trace;
For that dear trace the world I would resign:
O let me live, and die, and think it mine!
"I burn, I burn, as when thro' ripen'd corn
By driving winds the crackling flames are borne;"
Now raving-wild, I curse that fatal night,
Then bless the hour that charm'd my guilty sight:
In vain the laws their feeble force oppose,
Chain'd at Love's feet, they groan, his vanquish'd foes:
In vain Religion meets my shrinking eye,
I dare not combat, but I turn and fly:
Conscience in vain upbraids th' unhallow'd fire,
Love grasps her scorpions—stifled they expire!
Reason drops headlong from his sacred throne,
Your dear idea reigns, and reigns alone;
Each thought intoxicated homage yields,
And riots wanton in forbidden fields.
By all on high adoring mortals know!
By all the conscious villain fears below!
By your dear self!—the last great oath I swear—
Not life, nor soul, were ever half so dear!

R. B.



No. CXCI.

TO ROBERT RIDDELL, Esq., OF FRIAR'S
CARSE.

ELLISLAND, 1789.

SIR,

I WISH from my inmost soul it were in my power to give you a more substantial gratification and return for all your goodness to the poet, than transcribing a few of his idle rhymes. However, "an old song," though, to a proverb, an instance of insignificance, is generally the only coin a poet has to pay with.

If my poems which I have transcribed, and mean still to transcribe into your Book, were equal to the grateful respect and high esteem I bear for the gentleman to whom I present them, they would be the finest poems in the language. As they are, they will at least be a testimony with what sincerity I have the honour to be, Sir, your devoted, humble servant.

R. B.

No. CXCH.

TO THE RIGHT REV. DR. JOHN GEDDES.*

ELLISLAND, 3rd February, 1789.

VENERABLE FATHER,

As I am conscious that wherever I am, you do me the honour to interest yourself in my welfare, it gives me pleasure to inform you that I am here at last, stationary in the serious business of life, and have now not only the retired leisure, but the hearty inclination to attend to those great and important questions—what I am? where I am! and for what I am destined?

In that first concern, the conduct of the man, there was ever but one side on which I was habitually blameable, and there I have secured myself in the way pointed out by Nature and Nature's God. I was sensible that, to so helpless a creature as a poor poet, a wife and a family were incumbrances, which a species of prudence would bid him shun; but when the alternative was, being at eternal warfare with myself on account of habitual follies—to give them no worse name—which no general example, no licentious wit, no sophistical infidelity, would to me ever justify, I must have been a fool to have hesitated, and a madman to have made another choice. Besides I had, in "my Jean," a long and much loved fellow-creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and who could trifle with such a deposit?

In the affair of a livelihood, I think myself tolerably secure: I have good hopes of my farm, but should they fail, I have an Excise Commission, which, on my simple petition, will at any time procure me bread. There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an excise officer, but I do not intend to borrow honour from my profession; and though the salary be comparatively small, it is luxury to any thing that the first twenty-five years of my life taught me to expect.

Thus, with a rational aim and method in life, you may easily guess, my reverend and much-honoured friend, that my characteristical trade is not forgotten; I am, if possible, more than ever an enthusiast to the Muses. I am determined to study Man and Nature, and in that view, incessantly to try if the ripening and corrections of years can enable me to produce something worth preserving.

You will see in your book, which I beg your pardon for detaining so long, that I have been tuning my lyre on

the banks of Nith.† Some larger poetic plans that are floating in my imagination, or partly put in execution, I shall impart to you when I have the pleasure of meeting with you; which, if you are then in Edinburgh, I shall have about the beginning of March.

That acquaintance, worthy Sir, with which you were pleased to honour me, you must still allow me to challenge; for with whatever unconcern I give up my transient connection with the merely Great (those self-important beings whose intrinsic worthlessness is often concealed under the accidental advantages of their birth), I cannot lose the patronizing notice of the learned and the good, without the bitterest regret.

R. B.



No. CXCH.

ADDRESS OF THE SCOTTISH DISTILLERS

TO THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM PITT.

SIR,

WHILE pursy burgesses crowd your gate, sweating under the weight of heavy addresses, permit us, the quondam distillers in that part of Great Britain called Scotland, to approach you, not with venal approbation, but with fraternal condolence; not as what you are just now, or for some time have been, but as what in all probability you will shortly be. We shall have the merit of not deserting our *friends* in the day of their calamity, and you will have the satisfaction of perusing at least one honest address. You are well acquainted with the dissection of human nature; nor do you need the assistance of a fellow-creature's bosom to inform you that man is always a selfish, often a perfidious being. This assertion, however the hasty conclusions of superficial observation may doubt it, or the raw inexperience of youth may deny it, those who make the fatal experiment we have done will feel it. You are a statesman, and consequently are not ignorant of the traffic of these corporation compliments. The little great man who drives the borough to market, and the very great man who buys the borough in that market, they two do the whole business; and you well know they, likewise, have their price. With that sullen disdain which you can so well assume, rise illustrious Sir, and spurn these hireling efforts of venal stupidity. They are the compliments of a man's friends on the morning of his execution; they take a decent

* John Geddes, a remarkable self-taught genius, Roman Catholic clergyman, Biblical critic, and miscellaneous writer. He was born at Arradowl in Banff-shire in 1737, and died in London in 1802. He was author of the well-known humorous Scottish song called "The Wee Wifiekie."

† A copy of Burns' own poems, belonging to Bishop Geddes, into which the poet had transferred some of his recent productions.

farewell, resign you to your fate, and hurry away from your approaching hour.*

If fame say true, and omens be not very much mistaken, you are about to make your exit from that world where the sun of gladness gilds the path of prosperous men: permit us, great Sir, with the sympathy of fellow-feeling to hail your passage to the realms of ruin. Whether the sentiment proceed from the selfishness or cowardice of mankind is immaterial; but to a child of misfortune, pointing out those who are still more unhappy is giving him some degree of positive enjoyment. In this light, Sir, our downfall may be *again* useful to you; though not exactly *in the same way*, it is not perhaps the first time it has gratified your feelings. It is true, the triumph of your evil star is exceedingly despicable. At an age when others are the votaries of pleasure, or underlings in business, you had attained the highest wish of a British statesman; and with the ordinary date of human life, what a prospect was before you! Deeply rooted in *Royal Favour*, you overshadowed the land. The birds of passage, which follow ministerial sunshine through every clime of political faith and manners, flocked to your branches; and the beasts of the field (the lordly possessors of hills and valleys) crowded under your shade. "But behold a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven, and cried aloud, and said thus: Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches; shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit; let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches!" A blow from an unthought-of quarter, one of those terrible accidents which peculiarly mark the hand of Omnipotence, upset your career, and laid all your fancied honours in the dust. But turn your eyes, Sir, to the tragic scenes of our fate:—an ancient nation, that for many ages had gallantly maintained the unequal struggle for independence with her much more powerful neighbour, at last agrees to a union which should ever after make them one people. In consideration of certain circumstances, it was covenanted that the former should enjoy a stipulated alleviation in her share of the public burdens, particularly in that branch of the revenue called the Excise. This just privilege has of late given great umbrage to some interested, powerful individuals of the more potent half of the empire, and they have spared no wicked pains, under insidious pretexts, to subvert the spirit of their ancient enemies, which they yet dreaded too much openly to attack.

In this conspiracy we fell; nor did we alone suffer, our country was deeply wounded. A number of (we will say) respectable individuals, largely engaged in trade, where we were not only useful, but absolutely necessary to our country in her dearest interests; we, with all that was

near and dear to us, were sacrificed, without remorse, to the infernal deity of political Expediency, not that sound policy, the good of the whole. We fell to gratify the wishes of dark envy, and the views of unprincipled ambition! Your foes, Sir, were avowed; you fell in the face of day; your enemies were too brave to take an ungenerous advantage. On the contrary, our enemies, to complete our overthrow, contrived to make their guilt appear the villainy of a nation. Your downfall only drags with you your private friends and partizans: in our misery are more or less involved the most numerous and most valuable part of the community—all those who immediately depend on the cultivation of the soil, from the landlord of a province down to his lowest hind.

Allow us, Sir, yet further, just to hint at another rich vein of comfort in the dreary regions of adversity—the gratulations of an approving conscience. In a certain great assembly, of which you are a distinguished member, panegyrics on your private virtues have so often wounded your delicacy, that we shall not distress you with anything on the subject. There is, however, one part of your public conduct which our feelings will not permit us to pass in silence: our gratitude must trespass on your modesty; we mean, worthy Sir, your whole behaviour to the Scots Distillers. In evil hours, when obtrusive recollection presses bitterly on the sense, let that, Sir, come like a healing angel, and speak the peace to your soul which the world can neither give nor take away. We leave the honour to be, Sir, your sympathizing fellow-sufferers, and grateful humble servants,

JOHN BARLEYCORN, *Præses*.



No. CXCIV.

TO MR. JAMES BURNES, MONTROSE.

ELLISLAND, 9th February, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

WHY I did not write to you long ago is what, even on the rack, I could not answer. If you can in your mind form an idea of indolence, dissipation, hurry, cares, change of country, entering on untried scenes of life, all combined, you will save me the trouble of a blushing apology. It could not be want of regard for a man for whom I had a high esteem before I knew him—an esteem which has much increased since I did know him; and this caveat entered, I shall plead guilty to any other indictment with which you shall please to charge me.

After I parted from you, for many months my life was

* Th's letter was written while the Regency Bill was pending, and Pitt's downfall was thought certain.

one continued scene of dissipation. Here at last I am become stationary, and have taken a farm and—a wife. The farm beautifully situated on the Nith, a large river that runs by Dumfries, and falls into the Solway Frith. I have gotten a lease of my farm as long as I pleased; but how it may turn out is just a guess, and it is yet to improve and enclose, &c.; however, I have good hopes of my bargain on the whole.

My wife is my Jean, with whose story you are partly acquainted. I found I had a much-loved fellow creature's happiness or misery among my hands, and I durst not trifle with so sacred a deposit. Indeed I have not any reason to repent the step I have taken, as I have attached myself to a very good wife, and have shaken myself loose of a very bad falling.

I have found my book a very profitable business, and with the profits of it I have begun life pretty decently. Should fortune not favour me in farming, as I have no great faith in her fickle ladyship, I have provided myself in another resource, which, however some folks may affect to despise it, is still a comfortable shift in the day of misfortune. In the hey-day of my fame, a gentleman, whose name at least I dare say you know, as his estate lies somewhere near Dundee, Mr. Graham, of Fintry, one of the Commissioners of Excise, offered me the commission of an Excise officer. I thought it prudent to accept the offer; and accordingly I took my instructions, and have my commission by me. Whether I may ever do duty, or be a penny the better for it, is what I do not know; but I have the comfortable assurance, that come whatever ill fate will, I can, on my simple petition to the Excise-board, get into employ.

We have lost poor uncle Robert this winter. He had long been very weak, and with very little alteration in him he expired January 3.* His son William has been with me this winter, and goes in May to bind himself to be a mason with my father-in-law, who is a pretty considerable architect in Ayrshire. His other son, the eldest, John, comes to me I expect in summer. They are both remarkably stout young fellows, and promise to do well. His only daughter, Fanny, has been with me ever since her father's death, and I propose keeping her in my family till she be quite woman-grown, and be fit for better service. She is one of the cleverest girls, and has one of the most amiable dispositions, that I have ever seen.

All friends in this country and Ayrshire are well. Remember me to all friends in the north. My wife joins me in compliments to your bedfellow and family. I would write your brother-in-law, but have lost his address. For goodness sake don't take example by me, but write me soon. I am ever, my dear Cousin, yours most sincerely,
R. B.

* This friend of the poet died, not at Ellisland, but in his own house at Stewarton.

No. CXCv.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, LONGTOWN.

ISLE, 2nd March, 1789.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I arrived from Edinburgh only the night before last, so could not answer your epistle sooner. I congratulate you on the prospect of employ; and I am indebted to you for one of the best letters that has been written by any mechanic lad in Nithsdale, or Annandale, or any dale on either side of the Border, this twelvemonth. Not that I would have you always affect the stately stilts of studied composition, but surely writing a handsome letter is an accomplishment worth courting; and, with attention and practice, I can promise you that it will soon be an accomplishment of yours. If my advice can serve you (that is to say, if you can resolve to accustom yourself not only in reviewing your own deportment, manners, &c., but also in carrying your consequent resolutions of amending the faulty parts into practice), my small knowledge and experience of the world is heartily at your service. I intended to have given you a sheaf of counsels, but some business has prevented me. In a word learn *Taciturnity*; let that be your motto. Tho' you had the wisdom of Newton, or the wit of Swift, garrulousness would lower you in the eyes of your fellow-creatures. I'll probably write you next week. I am, your brother,

R. B.



No. CXCvi.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 4th March, 1789.

HERE am I, my honoured friend, returned safe from the capital. To a man who has a home, however humble or remote (if that home is, like mine, the scene of domestic comfort), the bustle of Edinburgh will soon be a business of sickening disgust:

"Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate you!"

When I must skulk into a corner, lest the rattling equipage of some gaping blockhead should mangle me in the mire, I am tempted to exclaim—"What merits has he had, or what demerit have I had, in some state of pre-existence, that he is ushered into this state of being with sceptre of rule, and the key of riches in his puny fist, and I am kicked into the world, the sport of folly,

or the victim of pride?" I have read somewhere of a monarch (in Spain, I think it was), who was so out of humour with the Ptolemaean system of astronomy, that he said, had he been of the Creator's council, he could have saved him a great deal of labour and absurdity. I will not defend the blasphemous speech; but often, as I have glided with humble stealth through the pomp of Princes Street, it has suggested itself to me, as an improvement on the present human figure, that if a man, in proportion to his own conceit of his own consequence in the world, could have pushed out the longitude of his common size, as a snail pushes out his horns, or as we draw out a prospect-glass, this trifling alteration, not to mention the prodigious saving it would be in the tear and wear of the neck and limb-sinews of many of his Majesty's liege subjects, in the way of tossing the head and tiptoe strutting, would evidently turn out a vast advantage, in enabling us at once to adjust the ceremonies in making a bow, or making way to a great man, and that too within a second of the precise spherical angle of reverence, or an inch of the particular point of respectful distance, which the important creature itself requires; as a measuring glance at its towering altitude would determine the affair like instinct.

You are right, Madam, in your idea of poor Mylne's poem, which he has addressed to me. The piece has a good deal of merit, but it has one great fault—it is by far too long. Besides, my success has encouraged such a shoal of ill-spawned monsters to crawl into public notice, under the title of Scottish Poets, that the very term Scottish Poetry borders on the burlesque. When I write to Mr. Carfrae, I shall advise him rather to try one of his deceased friend's English pieces. I am prodigiously hurried with my own matters, else I would have requested a perusal of all Mylne's poetic performances; and would have offered his friends my assistance in either selecting or correcting what would be proper for the press. What it is that occupies me so much, and perhaps a little oppresses my present spirits, shall fill up a paragraph in some future letter. In the mean time allow me to close this epistle with a few lines done by a friend of mine. . . . I give you them, that, as you have seen the original, you may guess whether one or two alterations I have ventured to make in them, be any real improvement.

"Like the fair plant that from our touch withdraws,
Shrink mildly fearful even from applause,
Be all a mother's fondest hope can dream,
And all you are, my charming Rachel, seem.
Straight as the fox-glove, ere her bells disclose,
Mild as the maiden-blushing hawthorn blows,
Fair as the fairest of each lovely kind.
Your form shall be the image of your mind;
Your manners shall so true your soul express,
That all shall long to know the worth they guess;

Congenial hearts shall greet with kindred bow,
And even sick'ning envy must approve."

R. B.



No. CXCVII.

TO THE REV. PETER CARFRAE.

ELLISLAND, 1789.

REV. SIR,

I do not recollect that I have ever felt a severer pang of shame, than on looking at the date of your obliging letter which accompanied Mr. Mylne's poem. . . .

I am much to blame; the honour Mr. Mylne has done me, greatly enhanced in its value by the endearing, though melancholy circumstance, of its being the last production of his muse, deserved a better return.

I have, as you hint, thought of sending a copy of the poem to some periodical publication; but on second thoughts, I am afraid that in the present case it would be an improper step. My success, perhaps as much accidental as merited, has brought an inundation of nonsense under the name of Scottish poetry. Subscription bills for Scottish poems have so dunned, and daily do dun the public, that the very name is in danger of contempt. For these reasons, if publishing any of Mr. Mylne's poems in a magazine, &c., be at all prudent, in my opinion it certainly should not be a Scottish poem. The profits of the labours of a man of genius are, I hope, as honourable as any profits whatever; and Mr. Mylne's relations are most justly entitled to that honest harvest which fate has denied himself to reap. But let the friends of Mr. Mylne's fame (among whom I crave the honour of ranking myself) always keep in eye his respectability as a man and as a poet, and take no measure that, before the world knows anything about him, would risk his name and character being classed with the fools of the times.

I have, Sir, some experience of publishing; and the way in which I would proceed with Mr. Mylne's poems is this:—I will publish, in two or three English and Scottish public papers, any one of his English poems which should, by private judges, be thought the most excellent, and mention it at the same time as one of the productions of a Lothian farmer of respectable character, lately deceased, whose poems his friends had it in idea to publish soon by subscription, for the sake of his numerous family; not in pity to that family, but in justice to what his friends think the poetic merits of the deceased; and to

* "These beautiful lines, we have reason to believe, are the production of the lady to whom this letter is addressed."—CURRIE.

secure in the most effectual manner, to those tender connections, whose right it is, the pecuniary reward of those merits.*

R. B.



No. CXCVIII.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, LONGTOWN.

ISLE, *Tuesday Even.*

DEAR WILLIAM,

IN my last, I recommended that invaluable apophthegm—learn taciturnity.

It is absolutely certain that nobody can know our thoughts; and yet, from a slight observation of mankind, one would not think so. What mischiefs daily arise from silly garrulity, or foolish confidence! There is an excellent Scots saying, that "A man's mind is his kingdom." It is certainly so; but how few can govern that kingdom with propriety?

The serious mischiefs in business which this flux of language occasions, do not come immediately to your situation; but in another point of view, the dignity of the man, now is the time that will either make or mar you. Yours is the time of life for laying in habits; you cannot avoid it, though you should choose; and these habits will stick to your last sand. At after periods, even at so little advance as my years, 'tis true, one may still be very sharp-sighted to one's habitual failings and weaknesses; but to eradicate, or even amend them, is quite a different matter. Acquired at first by accident, they by and by begin to be as it were *convenient*, and in time are in a manner a *necessary* part of our existence. I have not time for more. Whatever you read, whatever you hear, concerning the ways and works of that strange creature, Man, look into the living world about you—look into yourself for the evidence of the fact, or the application of the doctrine. I am, ever yours,

R. B.



No. CXCIX.

TO DR. JOHN MOORE, LONDON.

ELLISLAND, *23rd March, 1789.*

SIR,

THE gentleman who will deliver this is a Mr. Nielson,† a worthy clergyman in my neighbourhood, and a very

* A letter in answer to the one which the Rev. Peter Carfrae addressed to Burns, regarding some MS. poems left by a Mr. Mylne of Lochell. Mylne's pieces were published in 1790.

† The Rev. Edward Nielson, minister of Kirkbean, in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright.

particular acquaintance of mine. As I have troubled him with this packet, I must turn him over to your goodness, to recompense him for it in a way in which he much needs your assistance, and where you can effectually serve him:—Mr. Nielson is on his way for France, to wait on his Grace of Queensberry, on some little business of a good deal of importance to him, and he wishes for your instructions respecting the most eligible mode of travelling, &c., for him, when he has crossed the channel. I should not have dared to take this liberty with you, but that I am told, by those who have the honour of your personal acquaintance, that to be a poor honest Scotchman is a letter of recommendation to you, and that to have it in your power to serve such a character, gives you much pleasure.

The enclosed ode is a compliment to the memory of the Mrs. Oswald, of Auchencruive.‡ You probably knew her personally, an honour of which I cannot boast; but I spent my early years in her neighbourhood, and among her servants and tenants. I know that she was detested with the most heartfelt cordiality. However, in the particular part of her conduct which roused my poetic wrath, she was much less blameable. In January last, on my road to Ayrshire, I had put up at Bailie Whigham's, in Sanquhar, the only tolerable inn in the place. The frost was keen, and the grim evening and howling wind were ushering in a night of snow and drift. My horse and I were both much fatigued with the labours of the day, and just as my friend the Bailie and I were bidding defiance to the storm, over a smoking bowl, in wheels the funeral pageantry of the late great Mrs. Oswald; and poor I am forced to brave all the horrors of a tempestuous night, and jade my horse, my young favourite horse, whom I have just christened Pegasus, twelve miles farther on, through the wildest moors and hills of Ayrshire, to New Cumnock, the next inn. The powers of poesy and prose sink under me, when I would describe what I felt. Suffice it to say, that when a good fire at New Cumnock had so far recovered my frozen sinews, I sat down and wrote the enclosed ode.

I was at Edinburgh lately, and settled finally with Mr. Creech; and I must own that, at last, he has been amicable and fair with me.

R. B.



No. CC.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, LONGTOWN.

ISLE, *25th March, 1789.*

I HAVE stolen from my corn-sowing this minute to write a line to accompany your shirt and hat, for I can no more.

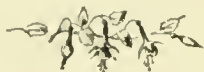
‡ See vol. i. p. 151.

Your sister Nannie arrived yesternight, and begs to be remembered to you. Write me every opportunity—never mind postage. My head too is as addle as an egg this morning with dining abroad yesterday. I received yours by the mason. Forgive this foolish-looking scrawl of an epistle. I am ever, my dear William, yours,

R. B.

P. S.—If you are not then gone from Longtown, I'll write you a long letter by this day se'ennight. If you shall not succeed in your tramps, don't be dejected, or take any rash step: return to us in that case, and we'll court Fortune's better humour. Remember this, I charge you.

R. B.



No. CCI.

TO MR. PETER HILL, BOOKSELLER,
EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 2nd April, 1789.

I WILL make no excuses, my dear Bibliopolus (God forgive me for murdering language!) that I have sat down to write you on this vile paper, stained with the sanguinary scores of "thae curs'd horse-leeches o' the Exeise." It is economy, Sir; it is that cardinal virtue, prudence: so I beg you will sit down, and either compose or borrow a panegyric. (If you are going to borrow, apply to our friend Ramsay * for the assistance of the author of those pretty little buttering paragraphs of eulogiums on your thrice-honoured, and never-enough-to-be-praised, Magistracy—how they hunt down a housebreaker with the sanguinary perseverance of a blood-hound—how they out-do a terrier in a badger-hole, in unearthing a resetter of stolen goods—how they steal on a thoughtless troop of night-nymphs as a spaniel winds the unsuspecting covey—or how they riot over a ravaged bawdy-house as a cat does o'er a plundered mouse-nest—how they new-vamp old churches, aiming at appearances of piety; plan squares and colleges, to pass for men of taste and learning, &c., &c.; while old Edinburgh, like the doating mother of a parcel of rakehell prodigals, may sing "Hooly and Fairly," or cry, "Waes me that e'er I saw ye!" but still must put her hand in her pocket, and pay whatever scores the young dogs think proper to contract.) I was going to say—but this d—mn'd parenthesis has put me out of breath—that you should get that manufacturer of the tinselled crockery of magistratual reputations, who makes

so distinguished and distinguishing a figure in the *Evening Courant*, to compose, or rather to compound, something very clever on my remarkable frugality; that I write to one of my esteemed friends on this wretched paper, which was originally intended for the venal fist of some drunken exciseman, to take dirty notes in a miserable vault of an ale-cellar.

O Frugality! thou mother of ten thousand blessings—thou cook of fat beef and dainty greens! thou manufacturer of warm Shetland hose and comfortable surtouts! thou old housewife, darning thy decayed stockings with thy ancient spectacles on thy aged nose! lead me, hand me in thy clutching palsied fist, up those heights, and through those thickets, hitherto inaccessible and impervious to my anxious, weary feet—not those damn'd Parnassian crags, bleak and barren, where the hungry worshippers of fame are breathless, clambering, hanging between heaven and hell; but those glittering cliffs of Potosi, where the all-sufficient, all-powerful deity, Wealth, holds his immediate court of joys and pleasures! where the sunny exposure of Plenty, and the hot walls of Profusion, produce those blissful fruits of Luxury, exotics in this world, and natives of Paradise! Thou withered sybil, my sage conductress, usher me into the refulgent, adored Presence! The Power, splendid and potent as he now is, was once the puling nursling of thy faithful care and tender arms! Call me thy son, thy cousin, thy kinsman, or favourite, and adjure the god by the scenes of his infant years, no longer to repulse me as a stranger or an alien, but to favour me with his peculiar countenance and protection! He daily bestows his greatest kindnesses on the undeserving and the worthless—assure him, that I bring ample documents of meritorious demerits! Pledge yourself for me that for the glorious cause of Lucre, I will do any thing, be any thing—but the horse-leech of private oppression, or the vulture of public robbery!

But, to descend from heroies—what, in the name of all the devils at once, have you done with my trunk? Please let me have it by the first carrier, except his name be Niven; he is a rascal who imposed, or would have imposed, on me the other day most infamously.

I want a Shakspeare: let me know what plays your used copy of Bell's Shakspeare wants. I want likewise an English dictionary—Johnson's, I suppose, is best. In these and all my *prose* commissions, the cheapest is always the best for me. There is a small debt of honour that I owe Mr. Robert Cleghorn, in Saughton Mills, my worthy friend and your well-wisher: please give him, and urge him to take it, the first time you see him, ten shillings' worth of anything you have to sell, and place it to my account.

The library scheme that I mentioned to you † is already

* Of the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*.

† The establishment of a parish library.

begun under the direction of Captain Riddell and *Me!* There is another in emulation of it going on at Closeburn, under the auspices of Mr. Monteith of Closeburn, which will be on a greater scale than ours. I have likewise secured it for you. Captain Riddell gave his infant Society a great many of his old books, else I had written you on that subject; but, one of these days, I shall trouble you with a commission for "The Monkland Friendly Society." A copy of the *Spectator*, *Mirror*, *Lounger*; "Man of Feeling," "Man of the World," "Guthrie's Geographical Grammar," with some religious pieces, will likely be our first order.

Write me first post, and send me the address of Stuart, publisher of the *Star* newspaper: this I beg particularly, but do not speak of it. I'll expect along with the trunk, my Ainslie's map of Scotland; and if you could send your boy to Mr. Beugo, Engraver, he has a picture of mine a-framing, which will be ready by this time. You see the freedom I take with you. Please direct any parcels to me to the care of Walter Auld, Saddler, Dumfries. When I grow richer I will write to you on gilt-post, to make amends for this sheet. At present, every guinea has a five-guinea errand with, my dear Sir, your faithful, poor, but honest friend,

R. B.

(By Stuart, I mean the famous Stuart who differed with the rest of the proprietors and set up by himself.)



No. CCII.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, SADDLER,
CARE OF MR. WRIGHT, CARRIER, LONGTOWN.

ISLE, 15th April, 1789.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I AM extremely sorry at the misfortune of your legs; I beg you will never let any worldly concern interfere with the more serious matter, the safety of your life and limbs. I have not time in these hurried days to write you anything more than a mere how d'ye letter. I will only repeat my favourite quotation:

"What proves the hero truly great
Is never, never to despair."

My house shall be your welcome home; and as I know your prudence (would to God you had *resolution* equal to your *prudence*!) if, anywhere at a distance from friends, you should need money, you know my direction by post.

The enclosed is from Gilbert, brought by your sister Nanny. It was unluckily forgot. Yours to Gilbert goes by post. I heard from them yesterday; they are all well.
R. B.



No. CCIII.

TO MR. JAMES JOHNSON, BELL'S WYND,
EDINBURGH.

ELLISLAND, 24th April, 1780.

DEAR SIR,

My trunk was unaccountably delayed in Edinburgh, and did not reach me till about ten days ago; so I had not much time of your music. I have sent you a list that I approve of, but I beg and insist that you will never allow my opinion to overrule yours. I will write you more at large next post, as I, at present, have scarce time to subscribe myself, dear Sir, yours sincerely,

R. B.



No. CCIV.

TO MRS. M'MURDO, DRUMLANRIG.*

ELLISLAND, 2d May, 1789.

MADAM,

I HAVE finished the piece which had the happy fortune to be honoured with your approbation; and never did little Miss with more sparkling pleasure show her applauded sampler to partial Mamma, than I now send my poem to you and Mr. M'Murdo, if he is returned to Drumlarnrig. You cannot easily imagine what thin-skinned animals—what sensitive plants—poor poets are. How do we shrink into the imbittered corner of self-abasement, when neglected or condemned by those to whom we look up! and how do we, in erect importance, add another cubit to our stature on being noticed and applauded by those whom we honour and respect! My late visit to Drumlarnrig has, I can tell you, Madam, given me a balloon waft up Parnassus, where on my fancied elevation I regard my poetic self with no small degree of complacency.

Surely, with all their sins, the rhyming tribe are not ungrateful creatures. I recollect your goodness to your humble guest—I see Mr. M'Murdo adding to the politeness

* Burns had visited the M'Murdos at Drumlarnrig, and now sends Mrs. M'Murdo a poem he had partially recited to her. They were very accomplished people.

of the gentleman the kindness of a friend, and my heart swells as it would burst, with warm emotions and ardent wishes ! It may be it is not gratitude—at least it may be a mixed sensation. That strange, shifting, doubling animal MAN is so generally, at best but a negative, often a worthless creature, that one cannot see real goodness and native worth without feeling the bosom glow with sympathetic approbation. With every sentiment of grateful respect, I have the honour to be, Madam, your obliged and grateful, humble servant,

R. B.



No. CCV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 4th May, 1789.

YOU see, Madam, that I am returned to my folio epistles again. I no sooner lit on any poetic plan or fancy, but I wish to send it to you; and if knowing and reading them gives half the pleasure to you, that communicating them to you gives to me, I am satisfied.

As I am not devoutly attached to a certain monarch, I cannot say that my heart ran any risk of bursting, on Thursday was se'ennight, with the struggling emotions of gratitude. God forgive me for speaking evil of dignities ! but I must say that I look on the whole business as a solemn farce of fragrant mummery. The following are a few stanzas of new Psalmody for that "joyful solemnity," which I sent to a London newspaper with the date and preface following :—

(KILMARNOCK, 25th April.

MR. PRINTER,

IN a certain chapel not fifty leagues from the market cross of this good town, the following Stanzas of Psalmody, it is said, were composed for, and devoutly sung on—the late joyful solemnity of the 23rd.

"O sing a new song to the Lord,
Make, all and every one," &c.) *

So much for Psalmody. You must know that the publisher of one of the most blasphemous party London newspapers is an acquaintance of mine, and as I am a little tinctured with Buff and Blue myself, I now and then help him to a stanza.

I have another poetic whim in my head, which I at present dedicate, or rather inscribe, to the Right Hon-

* See vol. i. p. 166.

ourable Charles J. Eox ; but how long that fancy may hold, I can't say. A few of the first lines I have just rough-sketched as follows :

"How Wisdom and Folly meet, mix, and unite ;
How Virtue and Vice blend their black and their
white," &c.†

I beg your pardon for troubling you with the enclosed to the Major's tenant before the gate ; it is to request him to look me out two milk cows ; one for myself, and another for Captain Riddell of Glenriddell, a very obliging neighbour of mine. John very obligingly offered to do so for me ; and I will either serve myself that way, or at Mauchline fair. It happens on the 20th curt., and the Sunday preceding it I hope to have the honour of assuring you in person how sincerely I am, Madam, your highly obliged and most obedient, humble servant,

R. B.



No. CCVI.

TO ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM, Esq.

ELLISLAND, 4th May, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR *duty-free* favour of the 26th April I received two days ago ; I will not say I perused it with pleasure ; that is the cold compliment of ceremony ; I perused it, Sir, with delicious satisfaction. In short, it is such a letter, that not you, nor your friend, but the legislature, by express proviso in their postage laws, should frank. A letter informed with the soul of friendship is such an honour to human nature, that they should order it free ingress and egress to and from their bags and mails, as an encouragement and mark of distinction to supereminent virtue.

I have just put the last hand to a little poem, which I think will be something to your taste. One morning lately, as I was out pretty early in the fields sowing some grass seeds, I heard the burst of a shot from a neighbouring plantation, and presently a poor little wounded hare came crippling by me. You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow who could shoot a hare at this season, when they all of them have young ones. Indeed there is something in that business of destroying for our sport individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, which I could never reconcile to my ideas of virtue.

"Inhuman man ! curse on thy barb'rous art,
And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye," &c.‡

† See vol. i. p. 152.

‡ See vol. i. p. 154.

Let me know how you like my poem. I am doubtful whether it would not be an improvement to keep out the last stanza but one altogether.

Cruikshank is a glorious production of the Author of man. You, he, and the noble Colonel* of the Crochallan Fencibles are to me

"Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my breast."

I have a good mind to make verses on you all, to the tune of "Three gude fellows ayont the glen."

R. B.



No. CCVII.

TO MR. WILLIAM BURNS, SADDLER,
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE.

ELLISLAND, 5th May, 1789.

MY DEAR WILLIAM,

I AM happy to hear by yours from Newcastle, that you are getting some employ. Remember,

"On Reason build Resolve,
That column of true majesty in man."

I had a visit of your old landlord. In the midst of a drunken frolic in Dumfries, he took it into his head to come and see me; and I took all the pains in my power to please and entertain the old veteran. He is high in your praises, and I would advise you to cultivate his friendship, as he is, in his way, a worthy, and to you may be a useful man.

Anderson I hope will have your shoes ready to send by the waggon to-morrow. I forgot to mention the circumstance of making them pumps; but I suppose good calf shoes will be no great mistake. Wattie has paid me for the thongs.

What would you think of making a little inquiry how husbandry matters go, as you travel, and if one thing fail, you might try another?

Your falling in love is indeed a phenomenon. To a fellow of your turn it cannot be hurtful. I am, you know, a veteran in these campaigns, so let me advise you always to pay your particular assiduities and try for intimacy as soon as you feel the first symptoms of passion; this is not only best, as making the most of the little entertainment which the sportabilities of distant addresses always give, but is the best preservative for one's peace. I need not caution you against guilty amours—they are bad everywhere, but in England they are the devil. I shall be in Ayrshire about a fortnight. Your sisters send their compliments. God bless you.

R. B.

* William Dunbar, W.S.

VOL. II.

No. CCVIII.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, Esq.

ELLISLAND, 13th May, 1789.

SIR,

THOUGH I intend making a little manuscript-book of my unpublished poems for Mrs. Graham, yet I cannot forbear in the meantime sending her the enclosed, which was the production of the other day. In the plea of humanity, the ladies, to their honour be it spoken, are ever warmly interested. That is *one* reason of my troubling you with this; another motive I have is a hackneyed subject in my letters to you—God help a poor devil who carries about with him a load of gratitude, of which he can never hope to ease his shoulders but at the expense of his heart! I waited on Collector Mitchell with your letter. It happened to be collection-day, so he was very busy; but he received me with the utmost politeness, and made me promise to call on him soon. As I don't wish to degrade myself to a hungry rook, gaping for a morsel, I shall just give him a hint of my wishes. I am going on with a bold hand in my farm, and am certain of holding it with safety for three or four years; and I think, if some cursed malevolent star have not taken irremovable possession of my zenith, that your patronage and my own priority then as an expectant, should run a fair chance for the division I want. By the bye, the Excise instructions you mentioned were not in the bundle; but 'tis no matter; Marshall in his "Yorkshire," and particularly that extraordinary man, Smith, in his "Wealth of Nations," find me leisure employment enough. I could not have given any mere *man* credit for half the intelligence Mr. Smith discovers in his book. I would covet much to have his ideas respecting the present state of some quarters of the world that are, or have been, the scenes of considerable revolutions since his book was written. Though I take the advantage of your goodness, and presume to send you any new poetic thing of mine, I must not tax you with answers to each of my idle letters. I remember you talked of being this way with my honoured friend, Sir William Murray, in the course of this summer. You cannot imagine, Sir, how happy it would make me, should you, too, illuminate my humble domicile. You will certainly do me the honour to partake of a farmer's dinner with me. I shall promise you a piece of good old beef, a chicken, or perhaps a Nith salmon, fresh from the wear, and a glass of good punch, on the shortest notice; and allow me to say that Cincinnatus or Fabricius, who presided in the august Roman senate, and led their invincible armies, would have jumped at such a dinner. I expect your honours with a kind of enthusiasm. I shall mark the year, and

mark the day, and hand it down to my children's children, as one of the most distinguished honours of their ancestor.

I have the honour to be, with sincerest gratitude, your obedient and very humble servant,

R. B.



No. CCIX.

TO MR. RICHARD BROWN.*

MAUCHLINE, 21st May, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I WAS in the country by accident, and hearing of your safe arrival, I could not resist the temptation of wishing you joy on your return—wishing you would write to me before you sail again—wishing you would always set me down as your bosom friend—wishing you long life and prosperity, and that every good thing may attend you—wishing Mrs. Brown and your little ones as free of the evils of this world as is consistent with humanity—wishing you and she were to make two at the ensuing lying-in, with which Mrs. B. threatens very soon to favour me—wishing I had longer time to write to you at present; and, finally, wishing that if there is to be another state of existence, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Burns, our little ones of both families, and you and I, in some snug retreat, may make a jovial party to all eternity! My direction is at Ellisland, near Dumfries. Yours,

R. B.



No. CCX.

TO MR. JAMES HAMILTON.†

ELLISLAND, 26th May, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

I SEND you, by John Glover, carrier, the above account for Mr. Turnbull, as I suppose you know his address.

I would fain offer, my dear Sir, a word of sympathy with your misfortunes; but it is a tender string, and I know not how to touch it. It is easy to flourish a set of high-flown sentiments on the subject that would give great satisfaction to—a breast quite at ease; but, as ONE observes who was very seldom mistaken in the theory of

life, "The heart knoweth its own sorrows, and a stranger intermeddleth not therewith."

Among some distressful emergencies that I have experienced in life, I have ever laid this down as my foundation of comfort—That he who has lived the life of an honest man, has by no means lived in vain!

With every wish for your welfare and future success, I am, my dear Sir, sincerely yours,

R. B.



No. CCXI.

TO GAVIN HAMILTON, Esq.

ELLISLAND, 1787.

MY DEAR SIR,

IT is indeed with the highest pleasure that I congratulate you on the return of days of ease and nights of pleasure, after the horrid hours of misery in which I saw you suffering existence when last in Ayrshire; I seldom pray for anybody, "I'm baith dead-sweer and wretched ill o't;" but most fervently do I beseech the Power that directs the world, that you may live long and be happy, but live no longer than you are happy. It is needless for me to advise you to have a reverend care of your health. I know you will make it a point never at one time to drink more than a pint of wine (I mean an English pint), and that you will never be witness to more than one bowl of punch at a time, and that cold drams you will never more taste; and above all things, I am convinced, that after drinking perhaps boiling punch, you will never mount your horse and gallop home in a chill late hour. Above all things, as I understand you are in the habit of intimacy with that Boanerges of Gospel powers, Father Auld, be earnest with him that he will wrestle in prayer for you, that you may see the vanity of vanities in trusting to, or even practising the carnal moral works of charity, humanity, generosity, and forgiveness of things, which you practised so flagrantly that it was evident you delighted in them, neglecting, or perhaps profanely despising, the wholesome doctrine of faith without works, the only means of salvation. A hymn of thanksgiving would, in my opinion, be highly becoming from you at present, and in my zeal for your well-being, I earnestly press on you to be diligent in chaunting over the two enclosed pieces of sacred poesy. My best compliments to Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Kennedy. Yours in the Lord.

R. B.

* Richard Brown of Irvine, Burns' early friend.—See LIFE.

† Hamilton was an unfortunate grocer in Glasgow.

No. CCXII.

TO WILLIAM CREECH, ESQ.*

ELLISLAND, 30th May, 1789.

SIR,

I HAD intended to have troubled you with a long letter, but at present the delightful sensations of an omnipotent tooth-ache so engross all my inner man, as to put it out of my power even to write nonsense. However, as in duty bound, I approach my bookseller with an offering in my hand—a few poetic clinches, and a song. To expect any other kind of offering from the Rhyming Tribe would be to know them much less than you do. I do not pretend that there is much merit in these *moreaux*, but I have two reasons for sending them: *primo*, they are mostly ill-natured, so are in unison with my present feelings, while fifty troops of infernal spirits are driving post from ear to ear along my jaw bones; and *secondly*, they are so short, that you cannot leave off in the middle, and so hurt my pride in the idea that you found any work of mine too heavy to get through.

I have a request to beg of you, and I not only beg of you, but conjure you, by all your wishes and by all your hopes, that the muse will spare the satiric wink in the moment of your foibles: that she will warble the song of rapture round your hymeneal couch; and that she will shed on your turf the honest tear of elegiac gratitude! Grant my request as speedily as possible—send me by the very first fly or coach for this place three copies of the last edition of my poems, which place to my account.

Now may the good things of prose, and the good things of verse, come among thy hands, until they be filled with the *good things of this life*, prayeth R. B.



No. CCXIII.

TO MR. JOHN M'AULEY, DUMBARTON.

ELLISLAND, 4th June, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH I am not without my fears respecting my fate, at that grand, universal inquest of right and wrong, commonly called *The Last Day*, yet I trust there is one sin, which that arch-vagabond, Satan, who I understand is to be king's evidence, cannot throw in my teeth—I mean ingratitude. There is a certain pretty large quantum of kindness for which I remain, and, from inability, I fear

* Inclosing some poetry.

must still remain, your debtor; but though unable to repay the debt, I assure you, Sir, I shall ever warmly remember the obligation. It gives me the sincerest pleasure to hear by my old acquaintance, Mr. Kennedy, that you are, in immortal Allan's language, "Hale, and weel, and living;" and that your charming family are well, and promising to be an amiable and respectable addition to the company of performers, whom the Great Manager of the Drama of Man is bringing into action for the succeeding age.

With respect to my welfare, a subject in which you once warmly and effectively interested yourself, I am here in my old way, holding my plough, marking the growth of my corn or the health of my dairy; and at times sauntering by the delightful windings of the Nith, on the margin of which I have built my humble domicile, praying for seasonable weather, or holding an intrigue with the Muses, the only gypsies with whom I have now any intercourse. As I am entered into the holy state of matrimony, I trust my face is turned completely Zion-ward; and as it is a rule with all honest fellows to repeat no grievances, I hope that the little poetic licenses of former days will of course fall under the oblivious influence of some good-natured statute of celestial prescription. In my family devotion, which, like a good Presbyterian, I occasionally give to my household folks, I am extremely fond of the psalm, "Let not the errors of my youth," &c., and that other, "Lo, children are God's heritage," &c., in which last Mrs. Burns, who, by the by, has a glorious "wood-note wild" at either old song or psalmody, joins me with the pathos of Handel's Messiah.

R. B.



No. CCXIV.

TO MR. ROBERT AINSLIE.

ELLISLAND, 8th June, 1789.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM perfectly ashamed of myself when I look at the date of your last. It is not that I forget the friend of my heart and the companion of my peregrinations; but I have been condemned to drudgery beyond sufferance, though not, thank God, beyond redemption. I have had a collection of poems by a lady put into my hands to prepare them for the press; which horrid task, with sowing corn with my own hand, a parcel of masons, wrights, plasterers, &c., to attend to, roaming on business through Ayrshire—all this was against me, and the very first dreadful article was of itself too much for me.

13th.—I have not had a moment to spare from incessant toil since the 8th. Life, my dear Sir, is a serious matter.

You know by experience that a man's individual self is a good deal; but believe me, a wife and family of children, whenever you have the honour to be a husband and a father, will show you that your present and most anxious hours of solitude are spent on trifles. The welfare of those who are very dear to us, whose only support, hope, and stay we are—this, to a generous mind, is another sort of more important object of care than any concerns whatever which centre merely in the individual. On the other hand, let no young, unmarried, rakehell dog among you, make a song of his pretended liberty and freedom from care. If the relations we stand in to king, country, kindred, and friends, be anything but the visionary fancies of dreaming metaphysicians; if religion, virtue, magnanimity, generosity, humanity, and justice, be aught but empty sounds; then the man who may be said to live only for others, for the beloved, honourable female, whose tender, faithful embrace endears life, and for the helpless little innocents who are to be the men and women, the worshippers of his God, the subjects of his king, and the support, nay the very vital existence of his COUNTRY, in the ensuing age; compare such a man with any fellow whatever, who, whether he bustle and push in business among labourers, clerks, statesmen, or whether he roar and rant, and drink and sing in taverns—a fellow over whose grave no one will breathe a single heigh-ho, except from the cob-web tie of what is called good-fellowship—who has no view nor aim but what terminates in himself—if there be any groveling earth-born wretch of our species, a renegade to common sense, who would fain believe that the noble creature Man is no better than a sort of fungus, generated out of nothing, nobody knows how, and soon dissipating in nothing, nobody knows where; such a stupid beast, such a crawling reptile, might balance the foregoing unexaggerated comparison, but no one else would have the patience.

Forgive me, my dear Sir, for this long silence. *To make you amends*, I shall send you soon, and more encouraging still, without any postage, one or two rhymes of my later manufacture.

R. B.



CCXV.

TO MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

ELLISLAND, 21st June, 1789.

DEAR MADAM,

Will you take the effusions, the miserable effusions of low spirits, just as they flow from their bitter spring? I know not of any particular cause for this worst

of all my foes besetting me, but for some time my soul has been beclouded with a thickening atmosphere of evil imaginations and gloomy presages. . . .

Monday Evening.

I HAVE just heard Mr. Kilpatrick give a sermon. He is a man famous for his benevolence, and I revere him; but from such ideas of my Creator, good Lord deliver me! Religion, my honoured friend, is surely a simple business, as it equally concerns the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. That there is an incomprehensible Great Being, to whom I owe my existence, and that he must be intimately acquainted with the operations and progress of the internal machinery, and consequent outward deportment of this creature which he has made; these are, I think, self-evident propositions. That there is a real and eternal distinction between virtue and vice, and consequently, that I am an accountable creature; that from the seeming nature of the human mind, as well as from the evident imperfection, nay, positive injustice, in the administration of affairs, both in the natural and moral worlds, there must be a retributive scene of existence beyond the grave, must, I think, be allowed by every one who will give himself a moment's reflection. I will go farther, and affirm, that from the sublimity, excellence, and purity of his doctrine and precepts, unparalleled by all the aggregated wisdom and learning of many preceding ages, though, *to appearance*, he himself was the obscurest and most illiterate of our species; therefore, Jesus Christ was from God. . . .

Whatever mitigates the Woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

What think you, Madam, of my creed? I trust that I have said nothing that will lessen me in the eye of one, whose good opinion I value almost next to the approbation of my own mind.

R. B.



No. CCXVI.

TO MISS HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS,*
LONDON,

ON READING THE POEM ON "THE SLAVE TRADE."

MADAM,

OF the many problems in the nature of that wonderful creature, Man, this is one of the most extraordinary—that he shall go on from day to day, from

* Miss Williams, a literary lady of some note (see Boswell's "Johnson"), had previously written a kind letter to Burns, which appeared first in the *Edinburgh Magazine*, 1817.

week to week, from month to month, or perhaps from year to year, suffering a hundred times more in an hour from the impotent consciousness of neglecting what he ought to do, than the very doing of it would cost him. I am deeply indebted to you—first, for a most elegant poetic compliment; then for a polite, obliging letter; and, lastly, for your excellent poem on the Slave-trade; and yet, wretch that I am! though the debts were debts of honour, and the creditor a lady, I have put off and put off even the very acknowledgment of the obligation, until you must indeed be the very angel I take you for if you can forgive me.

Your poem I have read with the highest pleasure. I have a way, whenever I read a book—I mean a book in our own trade, Madam, a poetic one—and when it is my own property, that I take a pencil and mark at the end of verses, or note on margins and odd paper, little criticisms of approbation or disapprobation as I peruse along. I will make no apology for presenting you with a few unconnected thoughts that occurred to me in my repeated perusals of your poem. I want to show you that I have honesty enough to tell you what I take to be truths, even when they are not quite on the side of approbation; and I do it in the firm faith that you have equal greatness of mind to hear them with pleasure.

I know very little of scientific criticism; so all I can pretend to in that intricate art is merely to note, as I read along, what passages strike me as being uncommonly beautiful, and where the expression seems to be perplexed or faulty.

The poem opens finely. There are none of those idle prefatory lines which one may skip over before one comes to the subject. Verses 9th and 10th in particular,

“Where ocean’s unseen bound
Leaves a drear world of waters round,”

are truly beautiful. The simile of the hurricane is likewise fine; and, indeed, beautiful as the poem is, almost all the similes rise decidedly above it. From verse 31st to verse 50th is a pretty eulogy on Britain. Verse 36th, “That foul drama deep with wrong,” is nobly expressive. Verse 46th, I am afraid, is rather unworthy of the rest; “to dare to feel” is an idea that I do not altogether like. The contrast of valour and mercy, from the 46th verse to the 50th, is admirable.

Either my apprehension is dull, or there is something a little confused in the apostrophe to Mr. Pitt. Verse 55th is the antecedent to verses 57th and 58th, but in verse 58th the connection seems ungrammatical:—

“Powers . . .
With no gradations mark’d their flight,
But rose at once to glory’s height.”

“Ris’n” should be the word instead of “rose.” Try it in

prose. Powers—their flight marked by no gradations, but (the same powers) risen at once to the height of glory. Likewise, verse 53rd, “For this,” is evidently meant to lead on the sense of the verses 59th, 60th, 61st, and 62nd: but let us try how the thread of connection runs:—

“For this . . .
The deeds of mercy, that embrace
A distant sphere, an alien race,
Shall virtue’s lips record, and claim
The fairest honours of thy name.”

I beg pardon if I misapprehend the matter, but this appears to me the only imperfect passage in the poem. The comparison of the sun-beam is fine.

The compliment to the Duke of Richmond is, I hope, as just as it is certainly elegant. The thought,

“Virtue . . .
Sends from her unsullied source,
The gems of thought in purest force,”

is exceedingly beautiful. The idea, from verse 81st to the 85th, that the “blest decree” is like the beams of morning ushering in the glorious day of liberty, ought not to pass unnoticed or unapplauded. From verse 85th to verse 108th is an animated contrast between the unfeeling selfishness of the oppressor on the one hand, and the misery of the captive on the other. Verse 88th might perhaps be amended thus: “Nor ever *quit* her narrow maze.” We are said to *pass* a bound, but we *quit* a maze. Verse 100th is exquisitely beautiful:—

“They, whom wasted blessings tire.”

Verse 110th is, I doubt, a clashing of metaphors; “to load a span,” is, I am afraid, an unwarrantable expression. In verse 114th, “Cast the universe in shade” is a fine idea. From the 115th verse to the 142nd is a striking description of the wrongs of the poor African. Verse 120th, “The load of unremitted pain,” is a remarkable strong expression. The address to the advocates for abolishing the slave-trade, from verse 143rd to verse 208th, is animated with the true life of genius. The picture of oppression—

“While she links her impious chain,
And calculates the price of pain;
Weighs agony in sordid scales,
And marks if life or death prevails”—

is nobly executed.

What a tender idea is in verse 180th! Indeed that whole description of home may vie with Thomson’s description of home, somewhere in the beginning of his “Autumn.” I do not remember to have seen a stronger expression of misery than is contained in these verses:

“Condemned, severe extreme, to live
When all is fled that life can give.”

The comparison of our distant joys to distant objects is equally original and striking.

The character and manners of the dealer in the infernal traffic is a well done, though a horrid, picture. I am not sure how far introducing the Sailor was right; for though the sailor's common characteristic is generosity yet, in this case, he is certainly not only an unconcerned witness, but in some degree an efficient agent in the business. Verse 224th is a nervous . . . expression—"The heart convulsive anguish breaks." The description of the captive wretch, when he arrives in the West Indies, is carried on with equal spirit. The thought that the oppressor's sorrow on seeing the slave pine, like the butcher's regret when his lamb dies a natural death, is exceedingly fine.

I am got so much into the cant of criticism, that I begin to be afraid lest I have nothing except the cant of it; and instead of elucidating my author, I am only benighting myself. For this reason, I will not pretend to go through the whole poem. Some few remaining beautiful lines, however, I cannot pass over. Verse 280th is the strongest description of selfishness I ever saw. The comparison in verse 285th and 286th is new and fine; and the line, "Your arms to penury you lend," is excellent.

In verse 317th, "like" should certainly be "as" or "so;" for instance—

"His sway the hardened bosom leads
To cruelty's remorseless deeds:
As (or, so) the blue lightning, when it springs
With fury on its livid wings,
Darts on the goal with rapid force,
Nor heeds that ruin marks its course."

If you insert the word "like" where I have placed "as," you must alter "darts" to "darting," and "heeds" to "heeding," in order to make it grammar. A tempest is a favourite subject with the poets, but I do not remember anything, even in Thomson's "Winter," superior to your verses from the 347th to the 351st. Indeed, the last simile, beginning with "Fancy may dress," &c., and ending with the 350th verse, is, in my opinion, the most beautiful passage in the poem; it would do honour to the greatest names that ever graced our profession.

I will not beg your pardon, Madam, for these strictures, as my conscience tells me that for once in my life I have acted up to the duties of a Christian, in doing as I would be done by.

I had lately the honour of a letter from Dr. Moore, where he tells me that he has sent me some books: they are not yet come to hand, but I hear they are on the way.

Wishing you all success in your progress in the path of fame, and that you may equally escape the danger of stumbling through incautious speed, or losing ground through loitering neglect, I have the honour to be, &c.,

R. B.

No. CCXVII.

TO ROBERT GRAHAM, Esq., OF FINTRY.

ELLISLAND, 31st July, 1789.

SIR,

THE language of gratitude has been so prostituted by servile adulation and designing flattery, that I know not how to express myself when I would acknowledge the receipt of your last letter. I beg and hope, ever-honoured

"Friend of my life! true patron of my rhymes,"

that you will always give me credit for the sincerest, chastest gratitude! The callous hypocrite may be louder than I in his grateful professions—professions which he never felt; or the selfish heart of the covetous may pocket the bounties of beneficence with more rejoicing exultation; but for the brimful eye, springing from the ardent throbbings of an honest bosom, at the goodness of a kindly active benefactor and politely generous friend, I dare call the Searcher of hearts and Author of all goodness to witness how truly these are mine to you.

Mr. Mitchell did not wait my calling on him, but sent me a kind letter, giving me a hint of the business; and on my waiting on him yesterday, he entered with the most friendly ardour into my views and interests. He seems to think, and from my own private knowledge I am certain he is right, that removing the officer who now does, and for these many years has done, duty in the division in the middle of which I live, will be productive of at least no disadvantage to the revenue, and may likewise be done without any detriment to him. Should the Honourable Board think so, and should they deem it eligible to appoint me to officiate in his present place, I am then at the top of my wishes. The emoluments of my office will enable me to carry on and enjoy these improvements in my farm, which, but for this additional assistance, I might in a year or two have abandoned. Should it be judged improper to place me in this division, I am deliberating whether I had not better give up my farming altogether, and go into the Excise whenever I can find employment. Now that the salary is £50 per annum, the Excise is surely a much superior object to a farm, which, without some foreign assistance, must, for half a lease, be a losing bargain. The worst of it is, I know there are some respectable characters who do me the honour to interest themselves in my welfare and behaviour; and as leaving the farm so soon may have an unsteady, giddy-headed appearance, I had, perhaps, better lose a little money than hazard such people's esteem.

You see, Sir, with what freedom I lay before you all my little matters—little, indeed, to the world, but of the most important magnitude to me. You are so good, that I trust I am not troublesome. I have heard and read a good

deal of Philanthropy, Benevolence, and Greatness of soul, and when rounded with the flourish of declamatory periods, or poured in the mellifluous of Parnassian measure, they have a tolerable effect on a musical ear; but when these high-sounding professions are compared with the very act and deed as it is usually performed, I do not think there is any thing in or belonging to Human Nature so badly disproportionate. In fact, were it not for a very few of our kind (among whom an honoured friend of mine, that to you, Sir, I will not name, is a distinguished instance), the very existence of Magnanimity, Generosity, and all their kindred virtues, would be as much a question with metaphysicians as the existence of Witchcraft. Perhaps the nature of man is not so much to blame for all this, as the situation in which, by some miscarriage or other, he is placed in this world. The poor, naked, helpless wretch, with such voracious appetites and such a famine of provision for them, is under a cursed necessity of turning selfish in his own defence. Except here and there a *scelerat* who seems to be a scoundrel from the womb of original Sin, thorough-paced selfishness is always the work of time. Indeed, in a little time, we generally grow so attentive to ourselves, and so regardless of others, that I have often in poetie frenzy looked on this world as one vast ocean, occupied and commoved by innumerable vortices, each whirling round its centre, which vortices are the children of men; and that the great design and merit, if I may say so, of every particular vortex consists in how wide it can extend the influence of its circle, and how much floating trash it can suck in and absorb.

I know not why I have got into this preaching vein, except it be to show you, Sir, that it is not any ignorance, but my knowledge of mankind which makes me so much admire your goodness to your humble servant.

I hope this will find my amiable young acquaintance, John, recovered from his indisposition, and all the members of your charming fireside circle well and happy. I am sure I am anxiously interested in all your welfares; I wish it with all my soul; nay, I believe I sometimes catch myself praying for it. I am not impatient of my own impotence under that immense debt which I owe to your goodness, but I wish and beseech that BEING who has all good things in His hands, to bless and reward you with all those comforts and pleasures which He knows I would bestow on you, were they mine to give.

I shall return your books very soon. I only wish to give Dr. Smith* one other perusal, which I will do in two or three days. I do not think that I must trouble you for another cargo, at least for some time, as I am going to apply to Leadbetter and Symons on Gauging, and to study my sliding rule, Brannan's rule, &c., with all possible attention.

* The author of "The Wealth of Nations."

An apology for the impertinent length of this epistle would only add to the evil. I have the honour to be, Sir, your deeply indebted, humble servant,

R. B.



No. CCXVIII.

TO MR. DAVID SILLAR, MERCHANT, IRVINE.

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES, 5th August, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

I WAS half in thoughts not to have written to you at all, by way of revenge for the two d—d business letters you sent me. I wanted to know all and about your Publication—what were your views, your hopes, fears, &c., &c., in commencing poet in print. In short, I wanted you to write to *Robin* like his old acquaintance *Davie*; and not in the style of Mr. Tare to Mr. Tret:—"Mr. Tret—Sir, This comes to advise you that fifteen barrels of herrings were, by the blessing of God, shipped safe on board the 'Lovely Janet,' Q. D. C., Duncan M'Leerie, master, &c., &c."

I hear you have commenced married man—so much the better for it. I know not whether the Nine Gypsies are jealous of my Lucky; but they are a good deal shy since I could boast the important relation of Husband.

I have got, I think, about eleven subscribers for your book. When you send Mr. Auld, in Dumfries, his copies, you may with them pack me eleven; should I need more, I can write you; should they be too many, they can be returned. My best compliments to Mrs. Sillar, and believe me to be, dear David, ever yours,

R. B.



No. CCXIX.

TO

1789.

DEAR SIR,

WHETHER in the way of my trade I can be of any service to the Rev. Doctor,† is I fear very doubtful. Ajax's shield consisted, I think, of seven bull hides and a plate of brass, which together set Hector's utmost force at defiance. Alas! I am not a Hector, and the worthy Doctor's foes are as securely armed as Ajax was. Ignorance, superstition, bigotry, stupidity, malevolence, self-conceit, envy—all strongly bound in a massy frame of

† Dr. McGill of Ayr. See "The Kirk's Alarm," vol. i. p. 155.

brazen impudence. Good God, Sir! to such a shield humour is the peck of a sparrow, and satire the pop-gun of a school-boy. Creation-disgracing *scelerats* such as they, God only can mend, and the Devil only can punish. In the comprehending way of Caligula, I wish they had all but one neck. I feel impotent as a child to the ardour of my wishes! O for a withering curse, to blast the germens of their wicked machinations. O for a poisonous Tornado, winged from the Torrid Zone of Tartarus, to sweep the spreading crop of their villainous contrivances to the lowest hell!

R. B.



No. CCXX.

TO JOHN LOGAN, Esq., OF KNOCKSHINNOCH.*

ELLISLAND, NEAR DUMFRIES,
7th August, 1789.

DEAR SIR,

I INTENDED to have written you long ere now, and, as I told you, I had gotten three stanzas and a half on my way in a poetic Epistle to you; but that old enemy of all "good works," the devil, threw me into a prosaic mire, and for the soul of me I cannot get out of it. I dare not write you a long letter, as I am going to intrude on your time with a long ballad. I have, as you will shortly see, finished "The Kirk's Alarm;" but, now that it is done, and that I have laughed once or twice at the conceits in some of the stanzas, I am determined not to let it get into the public; so I send you this copy, the first that I have sent to Ayrshire (except some few of the stanzas which I wrote off in embryo for Gavin Hamilton), under the express provision and request that you will only read it to a *few of us*, and do not on any account give, or permit to be taken, any copy of the ballad.

If I could be of any service to Dr. McGill, I would do it, though it should be at a much greater expense than irritating a few bigoted priests; but I am afraid serving him in his present *embarras* is a task too hard for me. I have enemies enow, God knows, though I do not wantonly add to the number. Still, as I think there is some merit in two or three of the thoughts, I send it to you as a small, but sincere testimony how much, and with what respectful esteem, I am, dear Sir, your obliged, humble servant,

R. B.

No. CCXXI.

SONNET TO ROBERT GRAHAM, Esq.,
OF FINTRY.

ON RECEIVING A FAVOUR, 10TH AUGUST, 1789.

"I call no goddess to inspire my strains;
A fabled Muse may suit a Bard that feigns," &c.†



No. CCXXII.

TO MR. PETER STUART, LONDON.

August, 1789.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE hurry of a farmer in this particular season, and the indolence of a poet at all times and seasons, will, I hope, plead my excuse for neglecting so long to answer your obliging letter of the 5th of August.

That you have done well in quitting your laborious concern in . . . I do not doubt; the weighty reasons you mention were, I hope, very, and deservedly indeed, weighty ones, and your health is a matter of the last importance; but whether the remaining proprietors of the paper have also done well, is what I much doubt. The . . . , so far as I was a reader, exhibited such a brilliancy of point, such an elegance of paragraph, and such a variety of intelligence, that I can hardly conceive it possible to continue a daily paper in the same degree of excellence: but if there was a man who had abilities equal to the task, that man's assistance the proprietors have lost.

When I received your letter I was transcribing for . . . my letter to the magistrates of the Canongate, Edinburgh, begging their permission to place a tombstone over poor Fergusson, and their edict in consequence of my petition, but now I shall send them to —. Poor Fergusson! If there be a life beyond the grave, which I trust there is; and if there be a good God presiding over all nature, which I am sure there is — thou art now enjoying existence in a glorious world, where worth of the heart alone is distinction in the man; where riches, deprived of all their pleasure-purchasing powers, return to their native sordid matter; where titles and honours are the disregarded reveries of an idle dream; and where that heavy virtue, which is the negative consequence of steady dullness, and those thoughtless, though often destructive follies, which are the unavoidable aberrations of frail human nature, will be thrown into equal oblivion as if they had never been!

† See vol. i. p. 191.

* Knockshinnoch is in Glenafton, Ayrshire. Mr. Logan died in Ayr, March 9, 1816.

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